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Representing Northern Business Since 1973

October 01, 2020

One Year Later:

On October 01, 2019, the NWT residents went to the polls and sent a clear message to the 19th Legislative Assembly; the status quo would not be tolerated. That election saw only six incumbents win their seats back. Some of the most important election items were transparency, reducing the cost of living, economy, and social services. As a territory, we knew this was going to be a bumpy ride. Of the 19 MLA's; 11 were brand new and that there would be a learning curve. Three months into this new Legislative Assembly, the word was hit with a global pandemic, something no one could be prepared for.

When the 19th Legislative Assembly was sworn in last year, the GDP was predicted to contract by {8.8%}. The GNWT revenues mainly come from tax revenue, which is collected through WSCC premiums, payroll tax; small business taxes; and royalties, to name a few. Once the pandemic hit, practically all NWT businesses had to close their doors, and many had to lay off their staff. Thus, causing an even further contraction of our GDP. Businesses are still struggling, and many, specifically in the tourism and hospitality industries, are looking at closing their doors forever and even bankruptcies.

To increase its revenues, the GNWT is now looking at creating a new government level that will further increase their expenses and decrease their revenues with the only hope of increasing the revenues by increasing the small business tax. Currently, the NWT has the highest small business tax in Canada. Further attributing to the increase in the cost of living in the NWT.

Businesses can not survive this; not only do they no longer have the financial ability to absorb any further operating costs, but they also can not compete with GNWT salaries and benefits. We are at a crossroads that if businesses have their operating costs involuntarily increased any further, they will no longer be able to provide a good/service that is reasonably priced.

On September 18, Yellowknife North MLA Rylund Johnston tweeted that all Yellowknife MLAs could use a refresher about their answers on the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce's Vote Growth platform. [Link](#) We could not agree more; we have complied each MLA's answers to 2 of the three questions posed to each candidate [1](#) and provided them in the appendix below.

[1. All Candidates Territorial Election Forum Answers released September 19, 2019](#)



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In summary of the answers in the below appendix, nowhere does anyone recommend that the opportunity to grow the economy is to grow the GNWT further. In fact, there were several very innovative ideas put forth by, at the time, candidates that would provide very easy wins for the GNWT and stimulate our economy without much money, such as reducing red tape; removing unnecessary barriers to growth, or staying open; not raising our cost of doing business that is already the highest in the country. For the second question, once again, there were several very innovative ideas on how to reduce our cost of living, which translates into the cost of doing business. No one suggested further increasing our living cost, which these however many new jobs will do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Bruce".

Jenni Bruce
President
NWT Chamber of Commerce

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Renée Comeau".

Renée Comeau
Executive Director
NWT Chamber of Commerce

Appendix A

Dehcho MLA:

Ronald Bonnetrouge: No response

Hay River North MLA:

RJ Simpson: no response

Hay River South MLA:

Rocky Simpson: no response

Inuvik Boot Lake MLA:

Diane Thom: no response

Inuvik Twin Lakes MLA:

Lesa Semmler: no response

Sahtu MLA:

Paulie Chinna: no response

Thebacha MLA:

Frieda Martselos: no response

Mackenzie Delta MLA:

Fredrick Blake Jr: no response

Monfwi MLA:

Jackson Lafferty: no response

Nukakput MLA:

Jackie Jacobson: no response



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**Frame Lake MLA:
Kevin O'Reilly:**

1. *The NWT Chamber of Commerce will be hosting Opportunities North this October which highlights key ways to grow the economy. Recent reports from the Conference Bureau of Canada and most recently CMHC pointed towards an economic slump. If you had the opportunity what would be your direct and specific action to grow the economy?*

Tourism is booming in Yellowknife but we are not getting the most out of this. We need to reopen a visitor center that lets tourists know what local tour companies are offering. It could be a great place for local artists to showcase and sell their work. Investing in a visitor center needs to be done with the City of Yellowknife as it develops a hotel tax and destination marketing. We also need longer runways at the Yellowknife airport to allow us to get direct flights from Asia, as Whitehorse has done for its European market.

Focusing on renewable energy is also a good job creation approach. Our energy needs are split three ways: community home heating and electricity, transportation, and industrial use. We could certainly become 100% self-sufficient with better insulated homes and use of wood pellets and chips. We would lower power costs and save on shipping of fossil fuels. We converted to a wood pellet boiler in our home and our heating costs were significantly reduced.

We could also harvest more solar, wind and hydro power to become more self-reliant instead of importing 80% of our energy sources. There are many innovations in transportation that would make a big difference such as biofuel and electric vehicles, especially in the South Slave with its excess power from Taltson. Improving existing housing stock and building new homes, will create jobs in all of our communities, lower the cost of living, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. A win-win situation all around.

In the last Assembly, an Arts Strategy was created to help this small but important part of our economy that continues to grow. An action plan is under development and should help guide further investment. There are some tremendous opportunities for partnerships with the federal government in this sector. We have a vibrant film industry, great performing artists and world class Indigenous crafts that can continue to grow.

This brings me to the development of an NWT Polytechnic University with a Yellowknife campus. We can and should become a place with more cold weather technology and design better systems for energy efficiency. We should also become a world leader in environmental remediation, whether it is at Giant Mine, Norman Wells or other contaminated sites. We also need to make sure that more of the benefits from remediation at Giant Mine stay in the north.

GNWT's own economic multipliers show that more jobs are created per dollar of investment in almost any other sector compared to mining and petroleum. Investment in forestry, agriculture and the fisheries, creates more jobs for the same spending. We need to invest our tax dollars and revenues in ways that will create the most employment in sustainable and innovative jobs.

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2. *The second stated priority for the 18th Legislative Assembly was cost of living. During the time of the 18th Legislative Assembly northerners have increasingly had their cost of living increased through the introduction of or increase of new fees and/or taxes. To name a few NTPC has increased rates an average of 31% over the last 5 years; the airport improvement fee; increase in land lease taxes; and introduction of the carbon tax. How do you propose to noticeably reduce the cost of living in your riding?*

For the record, I opposed the airport improvement fee and the carbon tax developed by Cabinet because of the lack of accountability in the legislation. There should have been a legislated advisory committee for the airport improvement fees as there is for recycling fees. I believe in a carbon tax as a critical tool for addressing the climate crisis but Cabinet's approach leaves all the rebates and grants to the discretion of future Finance Ministers with no public reporting. We could have had a system like the Yukon with rebates and grants for municipal and Indigenous governments and revenue-sharing as well.

On to how we can lower the cost of living. Investing in renewable energy and developing local sources of power could dramatically reduce our electricity and heating costs. If we used wood sources for heating and developed more district heating systems, that would bring cost savings. The use of hydro power could play a role, particularly for remote communities with small hydro potential such as Whati, Gameti, Wekweti and Lutsel K'e. When we get these communities off diesel, we will all save on power bills. This will take reorientation of the NWT Power Corp away from big grids and big projects to energy self-sufficiency for our communities and households. Large hydro projects such as Taltson expansion where there are no confirmed markets or business case, will lead to problems. One needs to look no further than Muskrat Falls in Labrador, Site C or many other large hydro projects that turned out to be too costly and ineffective. Taltson should be made to provide more power for the South Slave.

A retrofit program that allowed home owners to get a loan to do renovations to increase the energy efficiency of their homes would help cut heating costs as well. We could create a revolving fund where home owners could borrow and pay back the loan based on savings in heating costs. Funds from the carbon tax could help start this revolving fund. Arctic Energy Alliance programs should also be made more accessible and provide greater incentives towards energy self-sufficiency.

Food costs have also risen and so promoting and supporting local food production would help to provide fresher food and decrease the transportation required. The proposed fish plant in Hay River will help to build the fishing industry and promote a great northern resource that can help put food on our tables.

A few other ideas. We still need the Northern Resident Tax Deduction to be indexed to inflation. An improved Nutrition North program also needs to account for harvester support and inter-settlement trade of food products.

While I have focused on lowering the cost of living, we also have to make sure our Northern workers get fair wages and benefits. We need to more regularly review our minimum wage and move it towards a true living wage where individuals and families can make ends meet more easily here in the north. We also should consider a pilot project on a guaranteed basic income to look at how we can redesign our income support programs to become more empowering and efficient.



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**Great Slave MLA:
Katrina Noklbey:**

1. The NWT Chamber of Commerce will be hosting Opportunities North this October which highlights key ways to grow the economy. Recent reports from the Conference Bureau of Canada and most recently CMHC pointed towards an economic slump. If you had the opportunity what would be your direct and specific action to grow the economy?

With the diamond mines set to close in the next decade we need to expand the life of the existing mines while stimulating our exploration sector through key infrastructure projects such as the Mackenzie Valley Highway, the Slave Geologic Road, and the Talston expansion. We need to leverage the Giant Mine Remediation Project to build Indigenous businesses in the emerging reclamation and remediation fields to provide transferrable skills to locals and northerners. This will also ensure that dollars spent cleaning up existing mines remain in the north while we wait for the exploration sector to rebound. Expansion of our all-weather road system and green energy projects would inject money into the NWT construction sector as well as reduce the cost of doing business in the NWT.

A Polytechnic University would be a great way to attract new people to the territory. We have amazing talent in the NWT and could become a world class leader in climate change and permafrost research. Upon graduation it's likely many of these students would stay in the territory and continue with their research and work, increasing the number of transfer payments from the federal government. Students from the University would be a potential labour pool to work lower paying, service sector jobs that are currently experiencing a staffing shortage.

At the same time, we need to start building a parallel, sustainable economy for the children of the Northwest Territories and future generations. We must improve the efficiency with how we operate the government and solicit feedback from end-users and experts when making decisions that affect their lives and work. We need to increase investor certainty by settling land claims and increasing the cohesiveness of our government. We also need to build local capacity and employment through the utilization of successful Indigenous businesses such as Det'on Cho Corporation, Denesoline, and the Tlicho Group of Companies.

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We need to work on building our economy and implementing more efficient energy systems so that we can reduce the cost of living and power for citizens. We should increase funding for greenhouses, agriculture, and country food programs to deal with food security issues. We should also incentivize home ownership by offering grants or subsidies to first time homeowners and increase funding to organizations such as Arctic Energy Alliance that aid homeowners in retrofitting their homes to operate more efficiently.

The riding of Great Slave has a number of low-income residents who are hit particularly hard by the higher cost of living in the NWT. Many of these residents are new immigrants to Canada who likely face language and other barriers when trying to obtain higher paying jobs. I would support increased funding



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to programs that aid people new to Canada, and other low-income workers, in obtaining the skills necessary to be successful.

As I speak with more residents of Great Slave, I realize that the prohibitive cost of daycare is a huge issue in my riding. I would be in support of further daycare subsidies for low-income families as well as exploring the possibility of increasing daycare spaces in Yellowknife.



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**Kam Lake MLA:
Caitlin Cleveland:**

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There are two main ways the GNWT can support economic growth in the coming years. First we need to **make the NWT an attractive place to do business through** inclusion by bringing the right players to the table to remove our economic barriers. That means connecting government and regulatory boards to entrepreneurs and industrial partners for the purpose of socially and environmentally responsible development. And, second we need to prioritize settling Land Claims with integrity and respect.

The second way the GNWT can support economic growth is reducing the cost of doing business in the NWT through strategic infrastructure investments by diversifying our economy through made in the North public-private partnerships with northern businesses to address our insecurities and increase our resilience in the following five infrastructures:

- Energy;
- Agriculture;
- Communication;
- Education; and,
- Transportation.

Transportation infrastructure not only includes the Slave Geological Province all-season access road but also a need to evaluate the opportunity of an Arctic Deep Water Port. Russia, China and the United States have all positioned themselves as major players in the Arctic and are already at the table. We, the NWT, need to take a seat at this table to support and encourage socially and environmentally responsible activity through the Northwest Passage to ensure our economic opportunities in the Arctic are protected. As the Northwest Passage becomes more accessible a deep sea port would provide multiple economic and social gains for our territory:

- Lowering the cost of sea lift;
- search and rescue capabilities for international shipping;
- access to sustainable harvest of valuable arctic fisheries;
- protection of national sovereignty;
- tourism; and
- research.

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As a territory we receive our greatest income from our population size through Federal Transfer Payments. This means that the more people that live in the NWT, the more income we earn as a territory. Therefore, investing in marketing and incentive programs that encourage people to return or move to the North would be of great benefit.

In addition, we need to continue to invest in our infrastructure insecurities. This means investing in:

- Energy infrastructure to reduce the cost of energy and the reliance of our communities on diesel fuel;
- Transportation infrastructure through all-season roads;
- Communication infrastructure to increase broadband redundancy and our resilience to infrastructure failure;
- Agriculture infrastructure to create a means for the North to grow its own food; and
- Education infrastructure to grow, train, and retain skilled northerners.

To do this we can start by:

1. Increase incentives to support northern businesses involved in infrastructure growth.
2. Reduce redundancy and cost of program delivery by empowering Indigenous and community governments to administer programs and services.
3. Design a phased plan to close the funding gap between the City of Yellowknife and the GNWT.



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**Nahendeh MLA:
Shane Thompson:**

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I would have the Finance Minister reach out to Northerners to hear their concerns and their ideas on how to improve the GNWT's economy and how to utilize the budget as best we can. This will allow us to develop creativity in spending the 1.8-billion-dollar budget. Departments need to do zero-based budgeting to eliminate redundancy and duplication of services in the system. The 19 members of the Legislative Assembly need to implement a take a "Can-do" approach with the understanding that we are working for the residents of the Northwest Territories. In true consensus Government, it is about working together for the betterment of our residents.

I feel the Indigenous Governments' processes need to be completed which creates certainty for industry and investment in the North.

I believe contracts need to be awarded to Northern contractors for the economy to grow and flourish in the North. Northern contractors provide employment for Northerners and skills development. These contractors are invested not only in the local economy but in our communities as a whole, as many of the contractors are residents themselves. In other words fix the Business Incentive Policy (BIP). The program used to be used on all size contracts, but someone decided it was to be capped. We see large contracts going south with limited benefit to northerners.

We need creative ways to enhance tourism outside of the larger centers. Northerners offer a rich and diverse cultural and traditional perspective and experience, coupled with the incredible untouched landscape that few people have the pleasure of enjoying. Unfortunately, the larger centers are the only places many of our tourists visit due to the undeveloped Northern tourism industry.

I believe the utilization of green energy products would enhance the local economy. If you look at geothermal, not only does it operate the power plant but the heat can be used to heat buildings and greenhouses we build that will allow us to grow our own food. This would create more employment opportunities, careers, lower the cost of living in the community and make the community more self-sufficient.



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First I did not support the NTPC power rate increase, the airport improvement fee and the increase in land lease taxes. You are able to see in the record vote how I did not support these initiatives by the Executive Council. As for the carbon tax, it was a choice between a federal plan and a territorial plan. The territorial was better than what was being offered by the feds.

Moving forward, I would like to see the GNWT develop more green projects, such as geothermal, LNG, solar and other creative ways to reduce the demand on diesel. It is essentially about working with the communities to come up with a plan that meets their needs as well as using modern technology to enhance existing systems we currently have in place. We have a perfect example in the community of Fort Providence where SSI Energy has developed a system using modern technology to reduce the use of diesel fuel and utilize the waste heat for their business. This idea has reduce their costs.

Making homes more energy efficient which includes increased funding to the Arctic Energy Alliance. The 18th Assembly has increased their budget to enhance the work they are currently doing. I look at the success they have had in the small community of Jean Marie River, where they helped the Band and homeowners become more energy efficient. This needs to be done for all communities.

I realize we still require fuel to go hunting and fishing and trapping, however, we need to develop a plan whereby, there is a rebate at the pumps for residents, so they can continue a traditional lifestyle. Similar to the heating fuel rebate we currently have in place. This means working with the Federal Government to set up this plan.

Work with Nutrition North to allow five of the communities access the program to reduce the cost of food in the region.

Continue to work with ECE to fix the senior heating fuel issue. With the new changes we have seen higher costs to the seniors with less subsidy.

**Range Lake MLA:
Caroline Cochrane:**

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Everyone knows we need to diversify the economy and capitalize on revenue we can bring into the north from different sectors. We have untapped opportunities that need to be promoted and supported.

For example, we have over 100,000 tourists coming through Yellowknife every year. The GNWT needs to put a stronger emphasis on promoting and supporting our small businesses and the arts sector, to take advantage of this opportunity. The GNWT cannot do this alone however so we need to work closely with our business community/associations and all levels of government, to capitalize on existing, and potential, opportunities in this market.

I also believe the GNWT needs to advance the Polytechnic University. Investing in education is critical to expanding opportunities, trades-oriented learning, and fostering the knowledge economy, so northerners have the qualifications to access the opportunities that will be available. The GNWT has now implemented an advisory committee from polytechnics/universities across Canada to oversee our administrative policy work to ensure quality education. This fall the GNWT is scheduled to seek input from all stakeholders on areas of specialization. This will be a critical component on how we move forward and again we need to work closely with the all stakeholders as we develop this work.

These areas are important and have potential to increase economic growth. However, the mineral resources sector still contributes about 40% of our direct and indirect GDP, and supports many families and businesses not only in my riding but across the north. Many of us, including my own family rely on this industry. Our largest mines are closing but we still have lots of untapped potential. We have gold, silver, diamonds, lead, zinc, uranium, tungsten, nickel, copper, iron...and the list goes on. We have resources in the north we are still finding as many areas are under mapped and under explored.

Critical to the work in growing our economy is the development, and constant review, of a long term strategic economic plan. I don't believe the GNWT has all the answers, but I do believe that by working with all stakeholders we can develop comprehensive list of short, mid, and long-term goals with measurable outcomes and concrete actions.

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Some factors affecting cost of living are market driven, so I will focus on areas the GNWT has a direct link to. In regards to the "cost of doing business", the distance we have from the south and lack of infrastructure as well as our terrain and climate make it difficult to compare our cost of living to the south. However, during the last four years one of the biggest complaints I heard from business was the amount of contracts that were allocated to southern companies. In theory, the BIP (business incentive policy) sound great at 30%, however in practice it seems to have flaws. I feel the GNWT needs to review this policy in the next assembly, in consultation with our business partners, to ensure we provide the best support for all of our northern businesses.



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As for the carbon tax, my understanding was it was either the GNWT define how we would implement it, or have the federal government define it for us. In saying that though, if at any time the federal government decides to cancel it, I would be the biggest supporter to take it out of our legislation. But business is not only about infrastructure and opportunity, it is about people. If residents are not happy they will not stay. Over that last four years the GNWT, changed the co-pay program to assist more families to access necessary home repairs, improved the rent subsidy program to help ensure stable housing, increased the NWT Child Benefit, added funding for resident energy savings, and increased the funding for licensed day cares to alleviate parents having to incur additional costs. As well, Junior Kindergarten was implemented, with over 550 children attending across the NWT. The amount of saving this provides to families is substantial.

The concern of lowering our power costs is something we need to continue to focus on. We have made some progress. The amendment to the *Cities, Towns and Villages Act* I brought forward while I was the Minister of MACA, now allows municipalities to pass bylaws allowing property owners to finance, through local improvement charges, energy efficiency or renewable energy projects. This is not going to be beneficial to everyone though, so we need to continue to pursue the expansion of the Taltson Hydro line and implementing alternative energy sources in our diesel reliant communities. The GNWT has to subsidize the smaller communities due to their extreme living costs, so getting them off diesel will assist in the world's climate change issues and lower the costs for the GNWT and thus all of us as taxpayers.



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**Tu Nedhé-Willideh MLA:
Steve Norn:**

1. The NWT Chamber of Commerce will be hosting Opportunities North this October which highlights key ways to grow the economy. Recent reports from the Conference Bureau of Canada and most recently CMHC pointed towards an economic slump. If you had the opportunity what would be your direct and specific action to grow the economy?

This speaks directly to a number of my platform items, which is to assist businesses, and seek employment opportunities.

We must be innovative in keeping our economy afloat as our mining industry enters an ebb cycle. I firmly believe that the tourism industry will do just that. By developing our tourism industry, our economy will grow, the NWT is already a tourist destination, and we have observed a large influx of tourists in the past years. It is time to be creative and look at ways to keep as much revenue as possible in the Territory. In addition, there are two new infrastructure developments in the Taltson and the Slave Geological Corridor, these projects will need to be discussed. I can say that I am willing to work with all stakeholders involved to make sure the NWT will benefit from such projects and that they are done in an environmental and socially responsible manner.

I am also very supportive of small businesses and want to find ways to assist this sector. Recently, I was advised that one individual who made attempts to start a small business in their home in one of the communities. However, they lived in an NWT housing unit, and were not allowed to run a business out of their home. NWT housing policy currently does not allow for home-based businesses to run out of their units. I am not ok with this. How can budding entrepreneurs be expected to succeed with obstacles such as this? A majority homes in our communities are NWT housing units.

If I am elected, I would like to see many of our policies reviewed including but not limited to the following: BIP, Affirmative Action, and housing policies.

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If elected, I propose to create a committee that includes experts like economists, who can look at and address ways to lower our cost of living. Our Government needs to look at ways to keep money in the pockets of the people and be creative; I believe there are many ways to do this.

For example, while on a tour of a tank farm in one of the communities, I found out that the price of fuel was \$1.81/litre. This was a price set by the GNWT. I am not okay with that. People are moving out of the NWT because it is far too expensive to live here. We need to address this and make it a priority for the next Legislative Assembly to tackle issues such as these.

**Yellowknife Centre MLA:
Julie Green:**

1. The NWT Chamber of Commerce will be hosting Opportunities North this October which highlights key ways to grow the economy. Recent reports from the Conference Bureau of Canada and most recently CMHC pointed towards an economic slump. If you had the opportunity what would be your direct and specific action to grow the economy?

Mining is a pillar of our economy, generating jobs, taxes and royalties. All northerners are concerned about the impact of mine closures scheduled to begin in the next decade. I think mining can be part of our future, but we have some significant issues to address, not all of which are within the control of the GNWT.

There are a couple of mines with the necessary regulatory authorizations but no money for construction. This is a problem related to a tight money supply globally and impacts other mining jurisdictions as well. Part of the issue in the NWT is a lack of infrastructure, roads in particular. The road to Whati is permitted and construction is supposed to begin this fall, but Fortune Minerals has to raise the money for the additional 50 kilometers of road required to get to the deposit. It will be a challenge to do that because the deposit is relatively small and faces competition from less remote places. The road with the most potential to grow mining is the Slave Geological Province Corridor. Preparatory work is now underway. Once it is complete, it should go to environmental assessment.

Another part of the issue around mining development (and any other land-based business) is uncertainty of land tenure. Specifically within the southern NWT (eg. South Slave and Dehcho) there is a patchwork of land claims that have yet to be finalized. Negotiations are moving slowly. While GNWT is not the only party at table for these negotiations, they could expedite negotiations by committing to the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in this context.

Yet another part of the issue is electricity. I am told that mining companies want to hone their green credentials, so they don't want to power mines with diesel, as they do now. That means developing clean energy alternatives. Time is running out for this investment to have an impact on the diamond mines. But pending the results of the feasibility study, Taltson may power future projects along the SGP corridor. Once the feasibility study and other preparatory work is complete, the project should go to environmental assessment.

Yes, the regulatory system is viewed by some as being complex, but this is because it is unique in Canada and provides for an integrated system of land and water management built on settled land claims and on the assumption of co-management of resources by the territorial, federal, and indigenous governments. People have come to expect that decisions will reflect everyone's interests and rights. The regulatory system is key to reconciliation. Referral of projects to environmental assessment (EA) is the exception not the rule. But the EA process itself is expensive and it's usually only multinationals that have the funds to take a project through. That said, audits of the regulatory system conducted by third parties every five years since 2005 have not shown significant problems with the dreaded red tape.

Now about diversification. Tourism is growing especially in the North Slave. Government needs to invest in tourism infrastructure such as a visitor centre in Yellowknife and campgrounds here and throughout NWT. There also needs to be a greater investment in product development so tourists will stay in the North longer.

I am keen on investments in clean energy and retrofits. The retrofit economy offers a triple benefit: job creation, reductions to heating and power costs and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. We need to expand existing programs and make them more accessible to a broader user group. Numbers are impressive: a 9 per cent return on investment by 2030, along with a savings of \$120 million on utilities and a reduction of 121 thousand tonnes of CO2 in that period plus 87 jobs for at least a decade.



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An investment in child care makes a lot of sense. It offers great economic multipliers with multiple benefits. Parents can stay in workforce after parental leave. Child care offers employment throughout NWT. Most important, structured early childhood development will give children get the best possible start in life. Child care facilities are another infrastructure need in most communities but could be combined with school renos and/or new construction.

2. The second stated priority for the 18th Legislative Assembly was cost of living. During the time of the 18th Legislative Assembly northerners have increasingly had their cost of living increased through the introduction of or increase of new fees and/or taxes. To name a few NTPC has increased rates an average of 31% over the last 5 years; the airport improvement fee; increase in land lease taxes; and introduction of the carbon tax. How do you propose to noticeably reduce the cost of living in your riding?

I mentioned building retrofits and clean energy. I would like to see these programs expanded and made more accessible to low-income residents and commercial landlords, for example. These initiatives will reduce the cost of living (specifically heat and power bills) and have other important benefits as well including reducing greenhouse gas emissions and creating jobs.

The GNWT could decide to subsidize power rates. In 2014, government granted NTPC \$20 million when the Snare River hydro system had a low water problem. The government can create policy direction for the Public Utilities Board, the board that sets power rates. At this point Yellowknife subsidizes power rates in the NWT. If diesel communities went off grid with solar, wind or hydro, there would be less need to subsidize their rates, and that would reduce our rates. That said, there are warning bells ringing about the age of the NTPC infrastructure and the need for upgrades. This is an investment the government needs help from Ottawa to pay for because we just don't have the population base to afford it. The expansion of Taltson will also help reduce power rates.

The GNWT must rethink sources of revenue. A Revenue Options paper published in 2016 dismissed all the possibilities but produced no evidence to support its conclusions. The NWT tax base is set to shrink because of a weakening economy and aging population. We need to look at shifting taxation to those who do not live here. For example, the NWT corporate tax is now 11.5%. In Yukon, the same tax is 15%. Bringing the NWT on par would raise \$18 million a year. As well, the GNWT could earn an additional \$20 million a year for each 1% increase in the payroll tax. I prefer this approach rather than nickel and diming residents with fees and increases.



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**Yellowknife North MLA:
Rylund Johnson:**

1. The NWT Chamber of Commerce will be hosting Opportunities North this October which highlights key ways to grow the economy. Recent reports from the Conference Bureau of Canada and most recently CMHC pointed towards an economic slump. If you had the opportunity what would be your direct and specific action to grow the economy?

I believe we need to grow an economy for the future. I think the most transformative action we could take on that front is diversifying our economy. Here's some specific ideas on how we get there.

Invest in our Knowledge Economy: The territory has hardly scratched the surface of our knowledge economy. Key to realizing that promise is getting the polytechnic University built in Yellowknife. This is our chance to build a hub of forward-thinking research, innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit in our capital to help build the economy of the future.

Incentivize Entrepreneurs to Move Here: There are people across the country running businesses not necessarily tied to place. The federal transfer payment structure gives us a lot of room to play with incentive programs to encourage these businesses and entrepreneurs to come to our territory and build their lives and spend their money here. It's a major untapped market that I think we should pursue.

Invest in Infrastructure: We need to connect this territory physically and digitally. I support investing in transformative infrastructure projects like the Mackenzie Valley Highway to connect our communities and encourage economic opportunity from North-to-South. And I will advocate for our government to do its part in realizing the promise of the Mackenzie Valley Fibre Optic project, and push for fibre redundancy to our capital city to keep our businesses online.

2. The second stated priority for the 18th Legislative Assembly was cost of living. During the time of the 18th Legislative Assembly northerners have increasingly had their cost of living increased through the introduction of or increase of new fees and/or taxes. To name a few NTPC has increased rates an average of 31% over the last 5 years.; the airport improvement fee; increase in land lease taxes; and introduction of the carbon tax. How do you propose to noticeably reduce the cost of living in your riding?

I believe there are a few big things we can do to make life better for working people in this territory:

- **Universal Daycare:** right now Yellowknifers are spending around \$1000 a month per child in childcare. This is a particularly big burden on my riding, which has a lot of families. I will push for universal daycare for around \$10 a day to drop a big bill from families' pocketbooks, and help parents participate in the workforce.
- **Addressing our Utility Bills:** A big chunk of our monthly cost of living comes from what we pay for heat and electricity. I will push for more affordable heating and building retrofit incentives, and pursue an expansion of our clean electrical capacity across the territory so a chunk of Yellowknifers' bills aren't subsidizing diesel.
- **Evaluating our Fiscal Regime:** I think it's a valid question to ask whether we're charging fees and taxing the right groups for the right reasons. I will advocate for a holistic review of our territorial fiscal regime to see where we can lower the burden on our people.

**Yellowknife South MLA:
Caroline Wawzonek:**

1. The NWT Chamber of Commerce will be hosting Opportunities North this October which highlights key ways to grow the economy. Recent reports from the Conference Bureau of Canada and most recently CMHC pointed towards an economic slump. If you had the opportunity what would be your direct and specific action to grow the economy?

There are two parts to my answer: the need for a clear vision and then ideas for immediate action. A vision and a plan

The first task for the next Legislative Assembly is to create a collaborative and clear vision that will inspire investor confidence and drive economic prosperity. My vision going in would be that we need to revitalize our mineral resource sector, support growth among NWT-owned and managed small and medium sized enterprise and invest in education and innovation.

Direct and specific actions will be the building blocks in our plan to achieve a vision to grow the economy, not only to create processes that may have some impact on the economy. As we set goals, we need incremental performance indicators for each goal with clear points of accountability responsible for each one. I believe our public service wants to be empowered and engaged to create meaningful change and that it is possible to incentivize senior public servants to be accountable for measurable results. Ultimately, accountability for economic growth as a big picture goal rests on the shoulders of political leadership.

Direct and specific actions to achieve the goal

We need to catch-up on infrastructure across sectors from communications to transport to energy. That is a reality that must be part of any long-term economic vision for the NWT. Our political leadership will need to be decisive in order move from feasibility studies to capital investment.

There are also immediate actions that I believe can have a direct, specific and prompt impact on a growth vision for the economy:

1. Reduce "red tape": Regulations impact business development at all scales and across industries. I believe the desire to reduce "red tape" will easily find its way into the next Legislative Mandate. The question is how to do so effectively.

Why? To support early stage resource projects to move forward efficiently, to provide certainty to investors about the time it will take to scale up a project and see a return on investment, to encourage start up entrepreneurs to follow through on their ideas and to support business innovation.

How: I believe our goal should be to prioritize effective, streamlined and responsive regulatory systems. That means rules that achieve their intended goal but avoid redundancy and are responsive to the actual size or needs of a given circumstance or situation. There are many rule systems that can impede economic growth, such as:

- Environmental regulations that overlap between different levels of government or multiple government entities;
- Development or environmental processes that are not scaled to the nature of the application;
- Regulatory processes that allow for too many delays;

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- Food safety regulations that constrain growth of a local specialty food industry;
- Liquor licensing regulations that reduce the competitiveness of our local service industry;
- Provisions in the Mechanics Lien Act that may be out of step with more modern practices.

I think we need to analyze the purpose of a rule and ensure that its impacts are actually related to the purpose. When establishing new, more responsive rules, I think we should consider a commitment to always remove an old rule first. To really peak investor interest, we might consider a temporary commitment to remove two old rules for every new one. This will keep rule systems responsive, streamlined and dynamic.

2. Procurement: Establish responsive procurement policies that prioritize support for NWT managed and owned businesses, particularly those whose employees are paid salaries that stay in the NWT.

Why? Northern based businesses face higher operating costs compared to southern entities. Recognizing this reality and supporting northern-based businesses helps them grow, compete, develop capacity and encourages more employment in the NWT.

How: I believe that an independent panel composed of business representatives from around the NWT should be tasked with a short timeline (120 days) to deliver a proposal for change and improvement for GNWT procurement.

The “Business Incentive Program” (BIP) is the current policy intended to help level the playing field so that local businesses, and the NWT residents they employ, are competitive when bidding for government contracts against southern-based counterparts. Unfortunately, many in our business community are concerned that the current “BIP” is ineffective in achieving its purpose.

I have heard from members of the business community about different options to improve this system to support NWT based businesses. For example, one suggestion is that rather than a government-contract bidding-advantage, northern businesses could receive a form of subsidy or contract-advantage based on the number of salaries paid in the NWT. Another idea is to reward companies for “performance” of work using northern labor rather than reward them in advance for the “promise” of northern employment.

The GNWT should also support or incentivize local companies to partners together in order to have the capacity to bid on larger scale projects. Alternatively, or in addition, I believe we can find a way to support northern managed or led bids that keep the leadership of a project in the NWT but relies on support from companies based elsewhere to help bridge gaps in experience or knowledge.

I believe we have ideas around us to make NWT businesses more competitive. It is time to gather those ideas, analyze the information, make a decision and act.

3. Champion innovation: Create immediate opportunities for partnerships and collaboration between businesses, show our commitment to lifelong learning and build capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship across sectors.

Why? Investment in our mineral resource sector has fallen behind. I do not only want to catch up. I want to catch up and get ahead.

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How: The NWT needs to show our business community and potential investors that we are ready to lead with a vision for innovation from mineral resources to tourism. Direct and specific actions we can take immediately are to help facilitate partnerships, invest in education and reward innovation.

Effective partnerships need trust. Both during my time at the NWT Chamber and in my outreach with Indigenous Development Corporations and other businesses in the lead up to the campaign, I have consistently heard of a strong desire to create opportunities for networking, collaboration and partnerships. One benefit may be increased opportunities for multi-local partners bidding on larger scale projects. I think the GNWT can help facilitate opportunities to build, and in some cases rebuild, relationships and links between and within industries or sectors and government departments. The Premier's recent economic symposiums are a good example that brought Indigenous Governments, Indigenous Development Corporations and, later, other NWT businesses and business organizations together for a facilitated program. I think a more permanent, regular and inclusive program of this sort should be immediately established.

I am a strong believe in the power of lifelong learning as a creator of future prosperity. I believe the GNWT should always prioritize opportunities for education and training across industries and sectors. That can be industry-specific such as through the Mine-Training Society or support for students who choose to bring their education back to the NWT through adaptive Student Financial Aid repayment options. I believe we should also be decisive and strong in our support for a polytechnical university that capitalizes on our areas of particular strength such as rare earth minerals, technology metals and arctic climate science. We need to show that this is a jurisdiction that will prioritize lifelong education.

Last under this heading, I support the work that is beginning towards reimagining a northern-based knowledge economy and believe it needs to be championed. A knowledge economy will prioritize innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. This includes support for a university institution as a key component that can act as a research hub focused on northern research priorities. It could also include supporting a physical space similar to the successful artist space in Inuvik that provides shared space and tools for artisans or more like the broadly focused Yukonstruct facility in Whitehorse. It should also include flexible access to funding for early-stage research or project development scaled to the needs of small and medium sized businesses. The NWT cannot delay in showing itself to be dynamic and innovative – we need to move into leading a northern growth economy.

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There is a web of inputs that increase the cost of living and the cost of doing business. I believe it is important to be aware of those different inputs and how they impact one another in order to remain conscious of how different decisions – including choices around fees or taxes in one arena – might impact this long-standing challenge for NWT residents.

In addition to aiming to avoid or minimize any further increases in fees for government services, I believe we can have an impact on the cost of living and the cost of doing business by focusing on energy



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infrastructure and improving the availability of land access for municipal development. Efforts that target both residents and businesses have potentially double the impact: reducing the cost of living for residents reduces pressure for higher wages; reducing the cost of doing business should reduce pressure for higher costs in goods and services.

Energy: By improving energy infrastructure whether by increasing hydro capability or expanding grids, I believe we can impact both business operating costs and residential cost of living. In doing so, it is important to look to increase the overall demand for greener energy by supporting potential industry users. That way the fixed costs to produce the energy are spread out over more users. Whatever direction we chose will be expensive but I believe we need to be decisive and move forward.

Land access: Limited options for development within the City of Yellowknife results in a limited supply of commercial space which can drive up costs or reduce opportunity for development. I believe we need to work with the city to improve the city's ability to plan and respond to emerging needs or innovative development proposals. Establishing a plan to transfer land within the municipal boundary to the city may be a solution and I believe this should be actively explored. Changes in the way land is managed should include active consultation with Indigenous Governments on whose traditional territories the City is built.

I also believe we must actively seek a solution for more productive use of vacant spaces, particularly in the downtown core. To come up with innovative solutions, I would suggest a task force drawn from regional Indigenous Governments, the City of Yellowknife, GNWT and local business people involved in the real estate industry mandated to identify recommendations within a short, set timeframe.