

RESPONSES TO THE NWT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE and
NWT AND NUNAVUT CHAMBE OF MINES
FROM KEVIN O'REILLY, CANDIDATE FOR MLA FRAME LAKE

- 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 centre 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 centre 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.

- 2. Investment in mineral exploration is critical to maintaining the NWT's minerals industry and the NWT's economy, which is important in the NWT's path forward post-Devolution. It has been more than three Legislative Assembly terms since exploration investment in the NWT began to decline. It still hasn't recovered, preferring other territories and provinces instead. The Conference Board of Canada continues to predict grim economic consequences for the NWT as a result of mining decline. What specific actions would you take to turn this around, to rejuvenate mining investment in the NWT and keep our mining jobs, business, and tax revenues strong?*

Mining exploration investment has not returned because the markets and commodity prices do not support its recovery. It's not because we did not welcome the industry. Mining was very well represented in the last Assembly. I can't imagine how Premier McLeod could have done more to promote mining. We had our entire Cabinet go to Vancouver to promote mining in the NWT for each of the last four years.

The best diamonds are gone and those mines will close. Yes, there are other projects that are quite advanced but the obstacles are financial and market-driven, something we have little control over. We can consider public subsidies for roads and power grids to make more mines economically feasible. If this is to happen, there needs to be robust and independent analysis coupled with public debate around value for money. That work and debate has yet to happen. Some of that effort may even be better directed toward Giant Mine remediation with overall expenditures that will exceed a billion dollars. It is the largest project ever for Yellowknife. We need to make sure we maximize local benefits with jobs, training and contracts for northerners and our businesses.

We can control how we promote ourselves as a great place to live, work and do business. We have an environmental management system that is different by design, where local people get an important say. We have a world class environmental and resource management system. There are no mines in the Ring of Fire region of northern Ontario because of the uncertainty over land rights and management. We need to progress with the remaining NWT land rights negotiations. This should be a priority for the next Assembly.

I fought very hard to create a better *Mineral Resources Act*, where benefits would be clearly laid out and rules in various zones would be consistent and accountable. The mining industry also pushed for a well-defined appeal process to be directed by experts. I supported this approach. A lot more work is required to fully develop and implement a new system for mining rights. I pushed for a defined, inclusive process that would ensure participation by Indigenous governments, industry and other stakeholders. I have the experience and skills to help with the further development of this system and look forward to serving in the next Assembly.

- 3. 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.