

Hon. Wally Schumann

Minister of ITI

Norman Wells Chamber of Commerce

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Norman Wells, NWT

Thank you for the invitation to join you and to offer some words.

My job as a Cabinet Minister is requiring me to travel a lot. I am embracing the opportunity to meet and interact with NWT resident and leaders. It is a pleasure for me to be in the Sahtu this week – and in Norman Wells today.

It's an added pleasure to talk shop with business people like yourselves who can offer me a direct connection to the state of business and economic development in the community —and an important source of input for our government

Last week Premier McLeod and I were in Calgary to represent and promote NWT interests at the Arctic Oil and Gas Symposium.

It's no secret that the oil and gas industry here is facing challenges. But we continue to promote and move forward with initiatives - like the oil and gas strategy that we are developing - in order to improve the business case for oil and gas in the NWT.

Immediately, prior to this year's Arctic Oil and Gas conference, our government hosted a think tank of Aboriginal and government partners on the subject of northern transportation corridors — not just pipelines – but highways, waterways, fibre optic infrastructure and transmission lines that can play role in realizing our North's resource and economic potential.

We know that to achieve the long-held dream of resource and economic development for the North, Aboriginal people, in particular, must benefit - not just from training and jobs but as full partners, investors and owners.

It was good to have the input and participation of Sahtu representatives in this discussion.

It was also good to have the Sahtu so well represented at this year's AME Mineral Roundup in Vancouver. If we are going to revitalize investment interest in the NWT and the Sahtu, we are going to need partners and investors that are willing to work with our government, our people and their businesses.

This year's Round Up gave us an opportunity to market and promote the interests of the Sahtu together; territorial and Aboriginal government speaking as one. It sent a powerful message to industry that we are open for business and welcoming of new exploration.

This is the kind of ground work that we need to do to advance mining and oil and gas projects. And we're doing it. In the meantime, however, we're pursuing other projects as well.

Last time I was in Norman Wells it was to announce the work on the Canyon Creek Access Road. This will mean approximately 50 jobs, training and job experience gained from construction of the road. It will help to develop an experienced workforce here in Norman Wells and position Sahtu companies to benefit and lead future projects to complete the road to Tulita and eventually Wrigley.

For the last two summers we have facilitated the wire cleanup project along the CANOL trail. We are encouraging the federal government to continue that project this summer - but also to seek out the trained workforce that we have established as they move to expand their own remediation of the trail this summer.

We are also working to advance projects in the tourism and agriculture sectors.

We sponsored the first ever Norman Wells Farmers Market last summer that sold out almost immediately. We have been supportive of projects at Sahtu Gardens and McNeely Nursery to build on this success.

Meanwhile, the Mackenzie Valley Fibre Optic Project has also moved forward. One of the key drivers for this project was that it would provide opportunities for NWT businesses to complete and succeed in the digital economy. We are now seeing the improved access, faster downloads and reduced costs we envisioned. More importantly, the connection has been made. Businesses and companies can now work globally from here in Norman Wells.

The Fibre Optic Project, in particular, highlights an important point that I would like to leave with you today.

While we are working to put the resource, infrastructure and regional projects in place to drive our economy, we are reliant on small businesses like yours to be there to realize and leverage these benefits. It emphasizes the point that that we need to invest as much in a positive business environment and supporting young entrepreneurs as we do in training and developing a skilled workforce.

MLA McNealy has been a strong advocate for this. He has been holding my feet to the fire in the Legislative Assembly to ensure that we are investing in the futures of small businesses in the Sahtu with our policies, programs and funding initiatives.

The Department of ITI is currently concluding a review of the Support for Entrepreneurs and Economic Development - or SEED – program. You will be hearing more about this in the next month as we work to

make more funding available to small businesses - and to find better ways to promote the competitive business environment in which people like you can continue to invest and prosper.

That said, it's a tough time to be in business in Norman Wells. I appreciate that.

We continue to work with Enbridge and Imperial Oil - to address the situation that they are dealing with - and that you are facing collectively. We share your relief in knowing that it is still very much a temporary situation. And we appreciate the commitment that Imperial Oil has made to keeping its workforce employed.

In the meantime you have a business community here that - time and time again - has proven resilient, and resourceful in the face of economic challenges.

On the economic side of our mandate, the Government of the Northwest Territories will continue to support this town and this region by promoting and improving the business case for resource development, supporting opportunities for economic diversification, building the social, digital, and physical infrastructure that is needed and attracting, training, and maintaining a strong made-in-the-NWT workforce for the future.

Thank you for your support, your economic leadership and your ongoing commitment.