

The Honourable Caroline Cochrane
Premier of the Northwest Territories
PO Box 1320, Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9

June 3, 2021

Re: The Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce's Response to Emerging Stronger

Dear Premier Cochrane,

In the midst of a successful vaccination campaign, where 68% of the NWT's 18+ population are at least partially vaccinated¹, the Yellowknife business community is looking to our elected officials for a bold plan to guide the NWT through economic recovery and long-term prosperity. This draft of *Emerging Stronger* does not provide an actionable plan to support the NWT's economic future.

The inclusion of vague action items like "seek to assist the tourism, aviation, construction, hospitality and the mining sectors to position for survival and eventual rebound" (p.16) fails to inspire confidence in our current government's ability to support economic recovery for the Yellowknife business community. The government has an obligation to do more than "seek" to support these critical industries – we need an actionable plan with budgets and timelines.

Throughout the last year, the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce has been engaging with our membership and economic partners to create recommendations to support Yellowknife's economic recovery. We are asking the Government of the Northwest Territories to adopt these recommendations and include them in an updated version of the *Emerging Stronger* plan.

In our 2019 Territorial election platform, *Vote Growth*, we identified the lack of fibre redundancy as an important issue for Yellowknife businesses. Based on our 2019 analysis, we estimated that a 1-day outage results in a GDP loss of \$4.75 million², and as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, support of and investment in broadband infrastructure is more important than ever. While we are supportive of the GNWT's commitment to "further efforts to support broadband infrastructure for fast and reliable internet services across the NWT" (p.11), we recommend that the GNWT work with Northwestel to support the Yellowknife Fibre Redundancy Project through a combination of financial support and joint efforts to pursue federal funding to make this \$20-\$25 million project a reality.

Despite the GNWT's mandate commitment to "transform Aurora College into an accredited and independent polytechnic university over the next six years" (p.14), we have witnessed numerous attempts to de-rail the plan to create an independent institution, including on page 21 of the Aurora College Transformation Implementation Plan where it's stated that empowering the institution to operate at arm's length was "contingent on increased capacity within Aurora College to take on new responsibilities" (p.8). We recommend the GNWT commit to ensuring that Aurora College has the capacity to be fully independent.

We recently engaged with the NWT & Nunavut Construction Association and asked their Board of Directors to identify the top issues facing the construction industry. They informed us that there is a lack of tutoring and educational resources for people who need support to pass the Trades Entrance Exam - over the past

¹ Government of the Northwest Territories. (2021). *COVID-19 Vaccine Coverage: NWT Residents (18+)*. Retrieved from: <https://nwt-covid.shinyapps.io/Testing-and-Cases/?lang=1>

² Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce. (2019). *Vote Growth*. Retrieved from: <https://ykchamber.com/vote-growth/>

5 years, only 53% of NWT residents who wrote the Trades Entrance Exam passed on their first attempt, delaying, or ending nearly 300 apprenticeships³. We recommend that the GNWT include an action item to provide better support for people challenging the Trades Entrance Exam, which would support the development of more skilled tradespeople within the NWT.

In addition, we've heard from our membership about the importance of creating an NWT *Builders Lien Act*, which would ensure that NWT construction companies get paid on time for their work. We understand that the GNWT intends to repeal and replace the current *Mechanics Lien Act* with a new *Builders Lien Act* later in 2021 and recommend that the GNWT include this commitment as an action item under "support the hardest hit sectors" (p.16).

We've also had an opportunity to engage with the NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines to get their feedback on the top issues facing the mineral and exploration industry. They've asked us to lobby the GNWT to pursue all federal funding opportunities to support critical infrastructure projects including the Taltson Hydroelectricity Expansion Project, Slave Geological Province Corridor and Grays Bay Road and Port Project. We recommend that the GNWT include this action item under "expand and diversify the economy" (p.16).

As business and community leaders, we're ready to work with you to ensure a strong economic recovery for our community. We look forward to your response outlining a plan to implement the above recommendations.

Sincerely,



Tim Syer, President
Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce



Deneen Everett, Executive Director
Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce

³ NWT & NU Construction Association. (2020). *Re: NWT Polytechnic University Initial Areas of Teaching and Research Specialization*. Retrieved from:
<https://nnca.ca/sites/default/files/September%2028%20NNCA%20Letter%20to%20Minister%20Simpson.pdf>