

*The Honourable Nick Sibbeston
Senator for the Northwest Territories*

Newsletter Spring 2010

Up on the Hill

Parliament seems to be returning to normal after the extended break provided by the prorogation last December. The government claimed it needed time to recalibrate its agenda but, given how little has happened in the months since our return, it's hard to know what they meant. The Throne Speech was long, but offered little in the way of new ideas. The budget was a continuation of the 2009 stimulus package with a promise of deficit-fighting measures in the future. There was both good news and bad news for the north and for Aboriginal people.

Little legislation has been introduced so far this session, though several Bills affecting Aboriginal People are front and centre – one affects the definition of status Indian and another matrimonial property on reserve.

The government took advantage of the prorogation to appoint a number of new Senators, including my old friend and colleague, Dennis Patterson, the new Senator for Nunavut. Prorogation meant all the committees had to be re-established. Because the Conservatives now have more Senators than the Liberals, they get to have the majority on all the committees. As a result, I am only on one committee this session, Aboriginal Peoples, and for the first time in a number of years, I am neither the Chair nor Deputy Chair. Still, I intend to play an active role in the committee's study of Aboriginal education and any legislation that comes forward. Having less committee

work means I'll be able to devote more of energy to speaking in the Chamber and pursuing projects to benefit the NWT.

Budget News – Good, Bad and Ugly

Although there was little new money in Budget 2010, the good news is that what little money there was went to Aboriginal people and the North. Of particular interest to the NWT were the \$11 million to streamline the NWT regulatory system and \$8M for community based environmental monitoring (shared with Nunavut). Both programs cover 2 years. The supplementary health transfer to the three territorial governments was also extended for two years. The government provided \$45M for a revised Food Mail program. The extension of the 15% mineral exploration tax credit for another year was good news given the importance of mining to our economy.

For Aboriginal People, there were new funds for Aboriginal education (\$30M) and child and family services (\$53M) as well as \$10M to address the issues of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. More money will be spent on water systems on reserve and to maintain current Aboriginal Health programs. The government also announced \$199M more for residential school survivors. But most of that money will go to programs run by Health Canada or for higher than expected abuse settlements. Which brings us to the bad news.



Funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation ended on March 31. As a result more than 134 community based programs lost their funding and will have to close their doors. The remaining 12 regional programs like the Healing Drum in Yellowknife will continue for another year. I think this is a serious mistake by the government – much healing has been achieved but there is so much more to do – but I believe that we are a strong people and will continue on our path without funding. But it will be hard.

The firm deadline of next March to complete stimulus fund projects could create real hardships for the NWT. Logistics are difficult and building seasons are short. It may be hard to get work done on schedule. It is not clear where that will leave the GNWT or local governments but it might well be 'in the lurch.' Given that northern economies often lag southern ones, we need to get every last drop of benefit from stimulus spending both before and after the arbitrary deadline of March 31, 2011.

The federal government isn't the most efficient organization when it comes to

approvals or funding arrangements. The slowness with which they have rolled out the new economic agency for the North is a case in point. I'm concerned it will become a victim of future budget cuts if it isn't up and running by next year.

The ugly? The government has run up a massive deficit and many, including the Parliamentary budget officer, Kevin Page, think it isn't simply due to the recession or the stimulus spending. The government may have created a structural deficit – that is a long-term debt that can only be fixed with significant deficit fighting measures. But there is little in the budget to tell us what those will be. Reducing the rate of growth in government expenditures and letting the public service shrink through retirement seems unlikely to be enough.

The five year projections released by Federal departments provide a clue. Almost all of them forecast a decline in expenditures and staff. The exception seems to be Corrections Canada which is projecting massive increases in staff and spending as prisons are built to meet the Conservative agenda of "locking them up and throwing away the key." Given the high percentage of Aboriginal people in prison – many because of mental health and addictions issues due to the legacy of residential schools – it seems the government has lost sight of the balance between prevention and punishment a justice system needs.

New NWT License

I was very disappointed in the process and outcome of the decision regarding the new license plate. There should have been consultation with MLAs and the public. Surely we could have come with something better than "Spectacular," an odd word that's hard to say. "Mashi Cho" might have been a better choice. It's distinctly northern and would reflect our unique heritage. At least it's better than the New Brunswick plate that simply states "Conservation." Hard to know how that reflects the province.

Visitors' Corner



On November 23, 2009, I hosted a luncheon for The Western Arctic Aboriginal Head Start Council (WAAHSC) for the release of their longitudinal evaluation report entitled: "Aboriginal Head Start: Making a Difference in the Northwest Territories." This a report of what is working in the Aboriginal Head Start programs in the NWT, how the children are doing, and to gain feedback regarding the program activities, staff training and curriculum development.



Meeting Ambassadors from Latin America

The Cost of Doing Business

There was an article in Northern papers that identified me as the most expensive Senator. The article was prompted by a press release by the NDP, which was meant, I suppose, as a criticism on the Senate.

It should come as no surprise to people living in the Northwest Territories that my travel costs are high, just as it is no surprise

that our NDP MP spends more than any of his colleagues. In order to do our jobs, we both have to travel from our homes in the North to Ottawa. We are each allocated 64 round-trip tickets which also covers the travel of staff and a "designated traveler," in my case my wife, Karen. It would be difficult for me to do my job if I had to be separated from her for weeks in a row. And it is essential that my Ottawa staff come North to stay grounded in the realities of life in the NWT. Too much time in Ottawa isn't good for any one's sense of reality.

Not all of my travel is between Fort Simpson and Ottawa. I also use my travel points to visit communities throughout the NWT, consulting community leaders and residents on issues affecting them. Though our elected MP is our most important voice in Ottawa, most people I talk to think it is a good idea to have a second representative to speak for them, especially one, like a Senator, who can operate in a less partisan way. Finally, my work sometimes takes me to other parts of Canada, attending conferences as a speaker or delegate or to work on issues affecting Aboriginal communities and organizations.

It is no secret that on many of my flights, especially cross country ones, I often fly business class, as do many Senators, MPs and Ministers. The reason is two-fold. First, traveling constantly can be exhausting and it doesn't make a lot of sense to fly across the country for a meeting only to be too tired and sick to participate fully. Secondly, my schedule changes frequently and I need to book tickets that can be easily changed. Business class is generally only a bit more than full-fare economy and, strange as it seems, sometimes it is actually cheaper.

Did you know?

- *every piece of legislation has to pass both the House of Commons and the Senate to become law*
- *there are 308 MPs and 105 Senators*

Improving the Land Management System

It is generally well known that the land management system in the NWT is complex and that approvals for development are often very difficult and time consuming. A number of studies have highlighted the issues and almost everybody has an opinion on the matter. Some think the system should be changed to make economic development easier; others, that protecting the environment should be the main focus of the process.

The land (and water) management system should both protect the environment and allow for the orderly development of northern resources. It should promote sustainable development. Finding the proper balance will not be easy but I do think it can be done – there are examples in other parts of Canada where by working together, all stakeholders – First Nations, governments, industry and environmentalists – can all have a say and see their needs met.

Most people agree some change is needed but how we achieve that change is almost as important as what it is. Land claims must be respected and northerners must be consulted. And they must benefit. Government alone cannot make these decisions.

I don't have all the answers but I'm confident that working together, we can find the solutions we need. That's why I commissioned Jamie Bastedo to prepare a study of land management to look at what has been proposed so far and – using examples from other parts of Canada – make recommendations on how to move forward. I'm quite pleased with the final report, called "Seeking Certainty," which I think maps a path for reform that embraces both sustainable economic development and protection of the environment. I intend to distribute it widely throughout the NWT in the hope of stimulating some useful debate.

You can read the entire report on my website: <http://sen.parl.gc.ca/nsibbeston> Just click on Seeking Certainty under New This Update on the home page.

The Right to be COLD

A lot of people were disappointed in the results of the Copenhagen Climate conference. Although some initiatives were agreed on, no international plan to fight climate change was reached. Sadly, Canada seemed little more than a bit player when we should have been playing a leadership role. Maybe the only way to get the government to act is to change the constitution! I propose that we add a new section to the Charter of Rights – one I'm sure many northerners will support.

I suggest we include it under section 12 (protection against cruel and unusual punishment) as:

12.1 Everyone has the right not to be subjected to cruel and unusual global warming and has the right to be cold .



Speaking of Speeches

From time to time I'm asked to give speeches on issues such as economic development or Aboriginal rights. Usually, these events are in the Northwest Territories. In the past year I've spoken at the NWT Association of Communities in Inuvik and to a joint NWT Chamber of Commerce/Northern Aboriginal Business Association lunch in Yellowknife. When I speak I try to

follow the four-B rule of public speaking; Bold, Bright and Brief but never Boring!

Generally I try to mix in a little humour – mostly about life as a Senator – with some solid facts and a strong message about the topic at hand. I also always try to say something a little controversial even at the risk of upsetting a few people.

I post the written text of my speeches on my web-site for all to see – though sometimes I'll think of something while I'm talking and there's no guarantee my off-the-cuff remarks will be included in the version posted – though they almost always wind up in the press. I never claim to be misquoted, merely misunderstood.

My most recent speech was to a conference in the Yukon on First Nations and Resource Development. Here is an excerpt:

But running businesses is not something you can just learn out of a book. It takes experience, a certain amount of trial and error, and it takes mentorship.

Often communities want to put their own people to work right away. They put fresh graduates in charge of new businesses. Sometimes that works but sometimes it fails and that can lead to real problems both for the community and for the individuals.

An approach that has been taken by a lot of successful communities is to start by hiring the best managers around - even if they are not from the community or not even Aboriginal.

These managers have two jobs - the first is to get the business up and running and successful; the second is to train their replacement from among the local people working for them.

This is hard to do but in the long run it has been a very successful strategy in Westbank in BC, for the Inuvialuit in the Beaufort Delta, for Millbrook First Nation out in Nova Scotia.

Northward Ho!

By Hayden Trenholm

I lived in the North through most of the 1980s – spending two and a half years in Iqaluit (or Frobisher Bay as it was then known) before moving to Yellowknife in February of 1985. I worked for Municipal and Community Affairs for the first few years before becoming Senator Sibbeston's Executive Assistant when he was Premier. Later, I was a Policy Analyst in the Priorities and Planning Secretariat, advising Cabinet. I left in August of 1991 and other than a brief visit the following summer didn't come back until early in 2002. What a difference a decade makes!



Since then I've traveled back to the NWT nearly forty times. Most visits take me to Yellowknife but I've been to thirteen other communities over the years – as well as two diamond mines. Counting the places I visited when I lived there, I've been to 27 of the 33 communities in the current NWT (and about 20 in Nunavut) and I've met hundreds if not thousands of people as part of job.

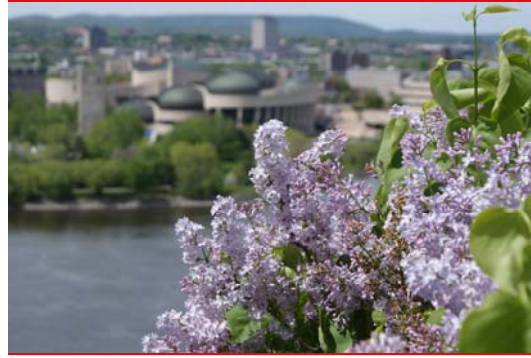
My last trip was fairly typical, though in this case I was joined by Renee Allen from our

office. We started with a trip to Fort Simpson where we had a good meeting with Chief Antoine to discuss economic development and relations with the federal government. This meeting was part of a long-term project of Senator Sibbeston to assist the First Nation move forward politically and economically. The rest of our time in Fort Simpson was spent re-organizing Nick's home office to help him be more efficient and in discussing strategy for the rest of the current session of Parliament and into the fall.

We then returned to Yellowknife where I had arranged a series of meetings, primarily to discuss Seeking Certainty, the paper on land management that Jamie Bastedo prepared for our office, though many other issues came up in the course of our meetings. During this trip, I met with Joseph Lanzon, representing Prairie Creek mine, Gabriella Sparling, the Deputy Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations with the GNWT, Doug Ritchie at Ecology North, Andrew Robinson of the Arctic Energy Alliance, Jennifer Grant of the Pembina Institute, Josh Campbell in Dennis Bevington's office and Vern Christiansen at the MVEIRB. I also had the chance to touch base with several local Liberals over coffee.

I got lots of great feedback on our paper as well as several ideas and suggestions for future projects – enough to keep me busy until my next visit. This is the main reason I travel North – to get the lowdown on all the issues and concerns affecting northerners. It is absolutely essential to be in touch and know what's going on in the North. Only then can I provide good advice to Senator Sibbeston. Every year I meet from a wide range of representatives from government and First Nations, from business and industry, environmental groups and social agencies. Often these discussions lead to follow-up meetings with Senator Sibbeston or to a variety of actions in Ottawa – meetings, letters, speeches or questions in the Chamber – as he presses the federal government on your behalf.

If you or your organization would like to meet me on my next trip to the NWT, drop me a line at sibba1@sen.parl.gc.ca or call Senator Sibbeston's office through the toll-free number: 1-800-267-7362, and I'll try to fit you in when I come back in the fall. And, if you are in Ottawa, feel free to drop over to our offices in East Block for a visit.



The Future of Fort Simpson

My little hometown of Fort Simpson, nestled at the junction of the Mackenzie and Liard rivers, is experiencing a bit of a downturn these days. Many young people who were raised and educated here no longer live here. There's simply no future where there's no economy or prospect of making a living. Five of my six grown children live elsewhere where there are better career opportunities. I notice it's much the same with other families and their children

The rivers are nice and the land and nearby mountains are inviting, but are not enough to draw young people back home. You can't live on the beauty of the land. You need to make a living. Jobs and business opportunities are needed. The few government and organization jobs that exist locally are not enough to attract the brightest and most ambitious.

In recent months a number of businesses have closed. Our own bed and breakfast, Bannockland Inn, closed last fall; the place now sitting empty along the Liard River. TJ's, the corner store which was originally started by Slim Jones in the '60's, then taken over by Stan Turner and most recently by Jim and Terry Villeneuve and their son

Gordie closed its doors this past winter, despite having a great location and plenty of customers. A 'for sale' sign hangs on the boarded-up doors. The more recently established motel, gas station and convenient store, 'Fort of the Forks' owned by Sodexo, Leo Hardy and the Band's company Nogha is reassessing its future. The restaurant part of the establishment has already closed.



It's always sad when businesses shut down. Somebody's dreams, money and effort have come to naught. In our case, without our knowledge, we built our B&B on land that had permafrost. Through time and heat, global warming maybe, our building began to sink and cause structural problems. In the case of TJ's, I don't know the reason for the closure but I recall Gordie indicating that the high cost of electricity was a factor. As to the 'Fort of the Forks', establishing such a large facility a bit out of the way at the junction of the Mackenzie/Wrigley highway, was always seen as a chancy venture. Its business success depends on high traffic which pipeline construction would have brought. The delay in Esso's decision whether they will proceed with the construction of the Mackenzie pipeline for two years undoubtedly was a blow.

So where does this put our little town? What alternatives are there to projects like the pipeline? Does our future depend on pipelines and mines or are there alternatives? Those questions are indeed those which the leaders of the community need to deal with.

I recall coming home to Fort Simpson in the late '70's after I had gone to university and

lived for awhile in Yellowknife. The community was very quiet with not much happening. The Berger inquiry had recommended a moratorium on pipeline development. While I myself didn't mind the quieter pace of life I realized that it couldn't stay like that. Something had to give, there had to be some development, people couldn't grow or develop in a vacuum. There had to be some development to keep people employed and create an opportunity for the young people who were coming out of school.

I was the MLA in 1979 when we began dealing with the issues that were similar to what we have now. 'Hire North' which had been a highway construction program involving training was winding down. What we did was to look at all the various government programs and see where there could a training component to it and there was an intensive house building program again using training as a part of it. This was the era when we also looked at government contracts to see where ever possible to negotiate contracts with local companies. In all of these ways we did manage to keep people working and get things done in the communities.

While it is important that we keep demanding that government programs help our town, whether through local contracts or by squeezing ever last benefit from the new expanded Park, things have changed in the North. Governments can't do it all and, in particular, they can't be relied on to create a real economy. For that we need business, both big and small, to create wealth and opportunities for our young people. We have to find new ways to benefit from the wealth of the land while preserving its beauty. That's the challenge facing us today.

Partisan Politics

Ottawa is all about which political party you belong to. It's like Catholics and Protestants. I worked most of my career in the NWT legislative assembly, where we did not have

a party system. To a certain extent, we vote in a federal election for the person rather for a party. So, I was surprised by the extent to which parties govern your life on a daily basis.

There's the liberal senate caucus where we gather every Tuesday for to discuss strategy, plans and positions that people will take on various subjects. On Wednesday, we have the northern and western caucus and then the national Liberal caucus where all the MPs and senators get together to talk of issues and plan how they will deal with the other parties.

I'm always amused about how the other parties are put down or characterized as almost evil and about to destroy the country. If truth be known, I like many things about the Conservatives such as their stance on abortion, same sex marriage and the long gun registry. And the NDP's positions on social justice are also pretty appealing to me.

I don't consider myself very partisan. I vote on issues, sometimes against our party on things that I think are best for the north. On the Aboriginal Peoples Committee where I'm most active, I and many others deal with issues in a very non-partisan way, always focusing on what's best for people.

Whenever I see the Minister of Indian & Northern Affairs, Mr. Strahl, and know he's going north on a trip, I ask him to invite me, but he never does. I tell him I'm the Senator for the NWT and I'm not partisan, but that doesn't seem to matter to him.

A couple summers ago when Prime Minister Harper was in Fort Simpson to announce the extension to the Nahanni Park, I was in the crowd, fifty feet in front of him, clearly visible to him and, while he introduced all the leaders there, he failed to recognize me. He was being partisan and that's the way politics are done in the south, but I felt that was rude and not the way that people in the north treat one another.

My brother in law, Leon Benoit, a Conservative MP, and I sometimes have lunch and it always raises eyebrows as

political people wonder what he is doing eating with a Liberal Senator. But that's how it is for a Northerner – lots of things, like family and community, come before party. Maybe, Ottawa should try to be a little more like the north.



Did you know?

- *The Northwest Territories has the third largest area of any jurisdiction in Canada - only Nunavut and Quebec are bigger.*
- *The Northwest Territories has the third smallest population - Nunavut and Yukon are smaller.*

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