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Northwest Territories Priorities for the Next Federal Government

As we approach the next federal election, I am writing on behalf of the people of the Northwest Territories (NWT) to understand how, if elected, your government would partner with us to advance the well-being of our communities, governments, economy, and environment.

The Northwest Territories plays a unique and vital role within the Canadian federation. Our governance model, rooted in consensus government and characterized by collaboration with Indigenous governments, is unlike any other in the country. The NWT is home to many distinct Indigenous nations at varying stages of negotiation and self-government. Through the NWT Council of Leaders, the Intergovernmental Council of the Northwest Territories, and other forums, we are leading the way in developing innovative models of co-governance and co-development. This approach embodies the spirit of reconciliation and shared leadership, particularly in advancing land, resource, and self-governance agreements.

While our vast natural resources present significant opportunities to contribute to Canada's economic growth, we are also facing urgent challenges. The NWT economy remains heavily reliant on resource extraction, primarily diamonds, and our existing mines are nearing the end of their lifespan amid global challenges. While we are eager to diversify and grow our economy, the immediate need for new resource development—particularly in the critical minerals sector—cannot be overstated. Of the 34 critical minerals listed by Natural Resources Canada, 24 have known occurrences in the NWT. Realizing their potential requires targeted investment and federal partnership.

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Climate change presents an additional and disproportionate challenge for the NWT. Our territory is warming at a rate four times the global average, resulting in increasingly severe flooding, wildfires, droughts, and permafrost loss. The 2023 wildfire season forced the evacuation of nearly 70% of our population—an unprecedented event that highlights the urgency of federal support for mitigation, preparedness, and recovery.

The NWT's governance structure is continually evolving to reflect the needs and aspirations of its people. As a majority-Indigenous jurisdiction with the highest per-capita rate of residential school survivors in Canada, we are advancing innovative models of reconciliation, co-management, and co-development. While this work is complex and challenging, it is fundamental to building a prosperous and inclusive future.

Moving forward, we require a federal partner who recognizes the people of the NWT as integral members of the Canadian community, deserving of equal access to services and opportunities. Ensuring equity in federal support—especially for Indigenous health, social services, housing, emergency management, and other essential services—must be a priority.

With these considerations in mind, I ask for your perspective on the following key areas:

1. RECONCILIATION & GOVERNANCE

The Northwest Territories is a leader in co-governance and co-development, with Indigenous governments playing a pivotal role in shaping our future.

- How will you partner with Indigenous governments and the GNWT to advance land claims, self-government agreements, and other shared priorities?
- What would your approach be to ensuring Northern and Indigenous communities receive equitable and culturally appropriate support across all areas, including health, housing, emergency management, and other essential services?

2. INFRASTRUCTURE & NATION BUILDING

Strategic infrastructure investment is essential for enhancing connectivity, promoting economic growth, and strengthening Arctic sovereignty. From the Mackenzie Valley Highway to the Taltson Hydro Expansion, the potential for transformative projects exists if supported by meaningful federal partnership.

- What would your government's approach be to closing the infrastructure gap in the NWT, including the high costs of energy, transportation, housing, and communications?

- How would you advance needed infrastructure if there is limited industry support or available P3 partners?

3. CLIMATE CHANGE AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

The impacts of climate change are disproportionately severe in the North, with increasing wildfires, floods, and permafrost loss.

- What is your plan to address climate change and support the North in responding to these impacts?
- What role do you envision your government playing in supporting Northern and Indigenous communities during emergencies?

4. HOUSING

The Northwest Territories is experiencing a severe housing crisis, marked by high construction, maintenance, and repair costs—particularly in remote communities. Overcrowding, inadequate access to transitional and supportive housing, and a lack of culturally appropriate solutions are persistent challenges, especially for those facing mental health issues, addictions, or homelessness. Indigenous governments are seeking equitable funding regardless of their land claim status, but the demand for housing support far exceeds available resources.

- What would your approach be to addressing the critical housing shortage in the NWT, including investments in public, transitional, and supportive housing?
- How would you ensure equitable housing funding for Indigenous governments, regardless of land claim status?
- How would your government support Northern communities in developing sustainable, culturally appropriate housing solutions?

5. ARCTIC SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

The best way to assert security and sovereignty in the Arctic is by investing in the people who live here.

- What approach would your government take to ensuring Canada's Arctic is secure and prosperous?

- How would you engage with the NWT and Indigenous governments to enhance Arctic security and sovereignty?

6. NORTHERN AFFAIRS

The Northwest Territories is unique within Canada, defined by its diverse landscapes, cultures, and peoples, along with a governance system that differs from other jurisdictions. Our consensus government model, working alongside the leadership of many distinct Indigenous nations, represents an innovative and collaborative approach to governance. Through mechanisms like the NWT Council of Leaders, we continue to demonstrate that co-governance and co-management can be successful and effective.

Dividing Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada between two Ministers has proven beneficial for advancing NWT priorities across federal departments. Having a dedicated Minister responsible for Northern Affairs has provided essential support for navigating complex intergovernmental relationships and addressing the distinct needs of the North.

- If elected, how would your government engage directly with Canada's North?
- Would a government led by you maintain the position of Northern Affairs Minister?
- What is your vision for the North, including the greatest opportunities and challenges you foresee over the next decade?
- How would you ensure that the aspirations and interests of Northern and Indigenous communities are meaningfully reflected in your government's national agenda?

Looking forward, effective federal partnerships and clear recognition of our unique governance structures will be essential. The North holds significant potential for Canada's future—whether through critical minerals, Arctic security, or our innovative governance models. However, our consensus government and co-management approaches remain poorly understood across the country. Building awareness and understanding of our governance system will be crucial to achieving our shared goals.

I look forward to reading your response and will publish this letter, along with those of other party leaders, on our website to assist residents of the NWT in making an informed decision in the 2025 federal election. If you have questions about the context of our territory before you respond, I would be pleased to meet with you in the coming weeks to provide additional context or answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R.J. Simpson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

R.J. Simpson
Premier

c. Kyla Kakfwi-Scott
Chief of Staff
Executive and Indigenous Affairs
Government of the Northwest Territories

Dr. Joe Dragon
Senior Envoy to the Government of Canada

John MacDonald
Secretary to Cabinet/Deputy Minister
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Government of the Northwest Territories

Shawn McCann
Deputy Secretary, Indigenous and Intergovernmental Affairs
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Lucy Watson
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Kelvin Kotchilea
Candidate – Northwest Territories