

MOTION TO REVOKE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

February 6, 2009 – Member for Great Slave

This is a sad day. It is unfortunate that we have to be here at all to consider a motion of this magnitude. It is unfortunate that this 16th Legislative Assembly had to get to such a negative place.

I was born and raised in the Northwest Territories. It is my home and I love it. There is no place I would rather be. When I die, what is left of me will be buried in the ground, here in the Northwest Territories.

I ran for MLA because I wanted to do good things for the people of the Northwest Territories and I still want to do good things for all of the people in the Northwest Territories. I believe in consensus government. I defend it every chance I get. Unfortunately, lately, my ability to defend it has wavered. I began to question consensus government as an institution. Can it be effective and can it work? Here's what I know: **It used to work.**

As indicated earlier, I have lived in the NWT all of my life and I have paid attention to the government. I have been interested in how a consensus government works as long as I can reMember. Prior to division, although there have always been minor hiccups now and again, it worked pretty well.

Back then, there were 24 Members. Of these, 8 were appointed to the Executive Council and there were 15 considered Regular Members. With that particular division in numbers, it was critical that the Cabinet-of-the-day had to provide rational arguments, based on research and facts in order to get a consensus on any topic. They had to work pretty hard and engage

Regular Members early on in the process, whether it was legislation, policy development, or any other political activity. As a result, there was a significant amount of two-way communication and healthy debate.

Cabinet-of-the-day had to develop its policies that pleased the majority of the entire Legislature with what they wanted to pass. They had to get at least 6 Members to support their position or they were stopped.

Now technically, this is still true. However, since division Cabinet only needs to get the support of two Members. As a result, they don't have to work as hard. They don't have to convince a large number of Members to support an initiative. It's easy to convince two. Based on the ease of getting two Members to come on side it isn't necessary for Cabinet to research decisions and base decisions on facts like they used to. If they want, they can simply base decisions on desire and belief. Two Members can be brought on side through promises not even related to discussions currently at hand.

With the numbers that exist can consensus government work? I believe the answer is yes. However, it is hard work and takes commitment from all Members. All Members must agree to work with consensus government. Cabinet has to agree to do the research and work required to make reasonable and informed decisions. They must then agree to share that information with the Regular Members and help them understand how Cabinet decisions are made so that Regular Members can also make informed and responsible decisions. Both sides need to agree to listen to each other points of view with respect. Both sides need to engage in healthy ways. The regular Members need to think about Cabinet position and not oppose everything that Cabinet says just because Cabinet says it.

We need to work to achieve consensus. Unfortunately it is a lot of work, and it takes a lot of time. It requires a lot of individuals to swallow their pride from time to time, and is easier for Cabinet to ignore and do whatever they want; for example, Supplementary Health Benefits and Board Reform.

Unfortunately, it's very clear that Consensus government is not working at this time. In fact, I don't think it has ever been in worse shape. There are clearly Members on both sides who are let their emotions and pride get in the way of their better judgement or what is in the best interest of the people of the Northwest Territories.

I support this motion.

I haven't always. Actually when I first heard rumours about it, I was completely opposed. However, some things have happened over the last couple of weeks that have forced me to support this motion.

My biggest oppositions to supporting this motion is that I feel a number of Cabinet Members are good. I have a significant amount of respect for the Honourable Michael McLeod, the Honourable Robert C. McLeod and the Honourable Jackson Lafferty. Regardless of how this motion goes down they will continue to have my support. If the motion passes, I will definitely put my "X" beside their name should they choose to run for Cabinet.

Having said that – and I will get into it a little later -- I do have a couple of concerns that I will bring up later with every Member.

If I support some and believe in them, how could I possibly support this motion? It is simple. I don't support Cabinet as an entity. On January 28th the Minister of Health and Social Services was quoted in the Yellowknifer saying, "A vote of non-confidence against us won't stop the policy from

coming into effect.” She was talking about Supplementary Health Benefits. She went further to say—and she was referring to a vote of non-confidence against her – “This is really about political ambition and political gesturing and it won’t make a difference as Cabinet has already made their decision and it won’t change.”

To me, this confirmed what many in the public and this side of the House have been saying and what I feared to be true. Cabinet, as an entity, doesn’t care what we think or say and doesn’t care what the people of the Northwest Territories want or think either. They know best, what is right and what is good. They are going to do what they want, when they want and how they want.

In my opinion, Minister Lee’s comments suggest that the entity which is Cabinet had betrayed consensus government, the Regular MLAs and the people of the NWT. Something needs to be done to restore our faith in this government.

I am no fool. I know Cabinet is made up of individuals. I know that we have no idea what the issues they fight for are or what they stand for in that Cabinet room. It is really difficult to pick on an individual Minister for a decision of an entire cabinet. We can’t. When they leave the Cabinet room, whether they have consensus or not, they speak with one voice and in one entity. Minister Lee’s comments came to the entire Cabinet with the same brush and they must all be held to account. How can we separate out individuals when it’s cabinet direction and blind devotion to Cabinet solidarity is really the problem?

I and other Members have tried to get Cabinet to work with us in many different ways. I have met and talked with Ministers. I expressed the need for communication. I have asked for inclusion in decision making. I have asked questions in the House, but to no avail. Nothing has worked. Something drastic that will, hopefully, get Cabinet Members to sit up and listen needs to be done; something of a serious enough nature to get them or the Cabinet Members who replace them to take Regular Members seriously, to take the resident of the NWT seriously. To practice the consensus style of government that we all profess to believe in, warrants support.

To me this motion was the only thing that I believe they would take seriously. Anything with less potential impact would be soundly ignored by the entity which is Cabinet. The beast would go back to its old habits.

Cabinet would go back to business as usual and continue to ignore us. For instance, they have continued to completely ignore motions passed by all 11 Regular Members. Motions such as the motion to return the public housing subsidy program back to the Housing Corporation. Ignoring important motions passed by the 11 Members without so much as a rationale, or at least an attempt to provide the Regular Members with a reason why Cabinet won't listen or act on the decision of the majority of the people of this Assembly. We speak on behalf of the people of the Northwest Territories. The majority speaks. Cabinet must listen.

I said earlier that there are three Members that I believe are good and work hard for the people of the Northwest Territories. I don't always agree with their decisions, but I respect them for the way that they work with us as a Minister responsible for a department, not as a Cabinet Member.

There are two other Members that I am currently on the fence with, and I am deeply troubled by the involvement of the Minister of Finance and the Minister of ITI for their involvement in the Opportunities Fund and their inability to help us understand how the decisions related to that fund were made and why. If this motion passes, I have a number of questions for each of them; hard questions that I will want answered before I consider putting my "X" beside their name. This motion will put ramifications behind those questions. If they can't be answered they won't be getting my support. If this motion does not pass, asking them these questions will be meaningless to them and I don't believe that we will get a sincere answer. Once again, I have no option but to support this motion.

For all five of these Members, I do have one problem with them which needs to be answered by each.

Our Premier, admittedly, had an intimate relationship with one of our Clerks of Committee. I know some of you are asking: what's the big deal? Here's the big deal. Cabinet has their solidarity. Regular Members have their Committees. These committees are the only place where we can freely vent our frustrations about Cabinet and political issues, and plan our daily business. It's supposed to be a safe place where we can trust that what we say won't be shared with anyone. The Clerk of Committees that entered into that intimate relationship with the Premier attended all EDI,

Government Ops meetings and most Priority and Planning meetings and was privy to all discussions. Regardless of whether or not she leaked the information –and honestly, I don't know if she did or not-- and for the record, information was definitely leaked, it was definitely a conflict and the Premier is smart enough to know that.

Nobody in their right mind would allow or support the hiring of a spouse or immediate family member of any Member of the Executive Council into the position of Clerk of Committees. It would be seen as a clear and obvious Conflict of Interest. The Premier having an intimate relationship with the Clerk is no different. It is still a conflict of interest.

After meeting with the Premier in December as Caucus, I met with him one on one and asked him to resign. In my opinion, the relationship constituted a clear conflict and demonstrated poor judgement on behalf of the Premier. The only thing and the right thing for the Premier to have done would have been to resign. I was told **no** by the Premier. I know that the majority of the Members on this side of the House had the same conversation with him. They were also told no. So, that is my problem with all of the Cabinet Members, including the ones I respect. They didn't appear to do anything other than stand blindly behind Cabinet solidarity and support the Premier. Bad form.

The Premier created a serious conflict situation and should have been asked to resign by you, the regular Cabinet Members. It has happened in the past. There is precedent. It should have happened this time. I was deeply disappointed that the entity that is Cabinet didn't feel the same way

and was willing to stand behind this serious conflict of interest. It puts a negative light on this entire Assembly.

So why didn't you as honourable Members ask the Premier to resign? If he refused, why didn't you tell him to resign and make it happen? As a Member of the Executive Council, each Member swore an oath that he or she would duly and faithfully and to the best of your ability, skill and knowledge execute the powers and trust reposed in them as a Member of the Executive Council of the Northwest Territories.

I trusted the Executive Council to do the right thing: live up to the standards of their office. Each Member swore to execute the powers and the trust that I and the residents of the NWT placed in them.

I have a lot of respect for the Premier. He's done a lot for this Territory and has been a strong advocate for the North and his constituents. He's been a good MLA. In the 15th Assembly he was a solid and respected Minister. He's definitely capable and would be a good Regular Member if that's the way things end up. Unfortunately, he made a bad decision and needs to stand up and take responsibility for his mistake and the damage it has done to the Legislature. Unfortunately, he's unwilling, so it looks like we'll have to do it for him.

As Members – and this is to all of us -- we all need to be cautious in our behaviour and actions. As politicians put in office by the people, we have a duty and a responsibility to behave in a decent and upstanding manner. We have to give up some of ourselves in the best interest of our office and the oath that we've all sworn.

In closing, and again, I support this motion because it has teeth, and I hope that it will make the entity known as Cabinet listen. Hopefully it will also make the individual Ministers think as well, even the ones that I hope put their names forward and get back onto cabinet.

This is consensus government. It takes a lot of work, but it's worth it. The people are worth it. The NWT is worth it. Let's revitalize it and get back to work. We owe it to the people of the Northwest Territories.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.