

**CONVENTION SUPPORT**

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, over the last couple of years there have been an increasing number of large conference meetings in the Northwest Territories. This summer, Yellowknife hosted the International Congress on Circumpolar Health Conference which was a huge success. It brought in hundreds of visitors to Yellowknife and the Northwest Territories, new visitors injecting new money into our economy.

This is clear evidence that events of this magnitude can successfully be facilitated within the Northwest Territories. Yellowknife, as an example, has capacity to facilitate large conferences. Without including billeting and Bed-and-Breakfasts, Yellowknife has over 695 sleeping rooms available as well as large meeting locations, including school gyms and other commercial rooms, to handle large groups. The capacity exists.

For years, different groups throughout Yellowknife have been discussing the construction of a conference centre. Many feel that a conference centre would be a draw and support the tourism industry in Yellowknife and the Northwest Territories. Many want Government support for the construction of a facility.

While there may be value in building a conference centre I'm not convinced that the GNWT should be involved in its construction. I am, however, convinced that the GNWT does have a role in helping promote the NWT as a great location for organizations to hold conferences.

To take advantage of this opportunity I would like to bring forward an idea which recently came forward to me from a Constituent which I believe has a significant amount of merit. Throughout the NWT there are a large number of associations with large numbers of members. Associations like

the NWT Medical Association, the Registered Nurses Association of the NWT and Nunavut, the Certified General Accountants Association of the NWT, the NWT Chamber of Commerce, the NWT Chamber of Mines, and so on. The majority of the Associations have a national counterpart. Some even have international counterparts. My constituent's suggestion was to provide some moderate financial reward to NWT based Associations when they convince their National or International counterparts to come to the NWT for their annual conferences or AGMs. This could be a great opportunity for both the local association and the Northwest Territories as a whole.

SEED funding currently exists to help promote diversity in our economy throughout the NWT. I believe with some minor amendments to this program we could easily utilize it to support a Conference Incentive to local northern associations. With this incentive in place I believe that many local Associations would be happy and willing to begin campaigning their National and International bodies to come to the NWT for their annual meetings and conferences.

If successful, this incentive could demonstrate the demand for an official conference centre in the NWT. If there is a business case, interested parties might be able to build a case and obtain money without relying on the GNWT. There are huge opportunities here.

Mr. Speaker later this afternoon I will be asking the Minister responsible for ITI some questions on this topic and seeking a commitment of this Government to find ways to promote the NWT as a suitable place for conferences by way of providing incentives to Northern groups who have the desire to encourage their national and international counterparts to come to the NWT for their meetings.