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Proposed Northern Development Agency

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak today about the proposed Northern Development Agency and whether or not our government is making any progress in discussions with the federal government on bringing this agency's headquarters to the Northwest Territories.

I also would like to know what the federal government's intentions are when it comes to the future of northern development. This new agency supposedly would consolidate existing northern development activities into one which, Mr. Speaker, I am fully supportive of. The announcement was made late last year and we still do not know where the agency will be located.

The case has got to be made by our government as well as aboriginal governments located in the Northwest Territories that the Northwest Territories is best suited as a location for this new agency. Obviously, we are centrally located between our sister territories and have tremendous potential for resource and economic development well into the future, all of which should and needs to be taken into consideration by the federal government when determining a location for this agency.

In March, I spoke of job postings pertaining to northern development which are located in Gatineau, Quebec. To me, Mr. Speaker, it is absurd that bureaucrats in Ottawa and Gatineau are making decisions about the future development of the three northern territories without actually being physically located in the North. I have hazarded a guess that many have never been north of 60.

The NWT is poised to develop a multi-billion dollar Mackenzie Gas Project, yet there are 29 positions in Gatineau that pertain to northern oil and gas. Where is our government at when it comes to encouraging the federal government to locate these positions where they rightfully belong, which is in the North?

During the 14th Assembly, I believe there was some work conducted by former Premier Stephen Kakfwi's government to research and determine which federal positions existed in the capital region that could be relocated to the North. My suggestions to our government today is that they move immediately to catalogue these positions and coordinate an effort with the Yukon government and the Government of Nunavut to lobby the federal government to put positions involved in northern development on the ground where they will have the greatest impact. That, Mr. Speaker, is in the three northern territories.

Devolution or no devolution, the positions belong here. It is plain and simple, Mr. Speaker. Devolution may take many more years to negotiate. At a minimum, the federal government must be made to recognize that northern development positions belong in the North. I believe it is the job of this government to examine the positions that exist and present a case to the federal government.

Let's convince them that these jobs would mean more to us, more for our economy and more for the development of our Territory as a whole if they were in fact located in the North. Mr. Speaker, devolution will come, but why can't the jobs come first? Mahsi.