

Candidates' Speeches

Mr. Kakfwi's Candidate Speech For Premier

MR. KAKFWI: Thank you, Mr. Chair and congratulations.

Good morning to my colleagues and people of the public who are attending in the gallery. I would like to take a minute to thank my constituents in the Sahtu, the women and the children who are up here in the North, the teachers who are on strike, the elders, the youth and the children who all have a stake in the decisions we are going to make today and tomorrow and for the duration of our term.

I want you to know that I am grateful for the privilege of serving the people of the North again, as I have for 12 years. I am grateful for the support from the Sahtu, support from my family, my wife and children.

I visited a friend of mine in the hospital last week. He has cancer. He is under a lot of pressure to decide what to do. He put this all in perspective. No matter what happens today and tomorrow, I have my health, my family, and the achievements I have been able to accomplish today. I have all of that, and that makes me grateful.

This is the third time that I have put my name forward to be Premier. Of course it is difficult to do again. No one likes to lose. It is difficult on family and friends. It is a painful experience. So why do I do it again? I think I am compelled because of the support that many of you have given me. It gives me the courage to not be afraid. Winston Churchill once said; "You can never win if you become too afraid to lose".

I think it is important. As politicians we are going to face difficult decisions like this in the future. What do we do if we are afraid of criticism? If we are afraid of what people will say when we make difficult choices. I want you to know that I believe in myself. I believe my convictions and principles will serve you well. It is a sincere offer to serve again. I do it with my heart and with my convictions. As someone said, I still have fire in my belly. After all these years, I am not tired. I am not burnt out. I see an exciting opportunity to lead the North into the new millennium. New and better relationships, and a new, stronger Cabinet; an Assembly in which all of us will treat each other with respect, set some targets and work together to achieve them. That is what I see.

The commitment to serve aboriginal people has been my life story since I was 23 years old. I am 49 this year. There is nothing else that I choose to do. This is my life commitment. I want to thank you for your support. I want to thank you for the words of encouragement that you have given me. When I was 12 years old, I started a life away from home for six years. In many ways I came from a very traumatic, broken life. When I went away to Brandon College, I met a man named Father Pochat. That man was my father figure for six years. I was afraid to go there because of the experience I had in Grollier Hall. He taught me that I should never be afraid. Fear should not prevent me from trying to do things.

I mention him because he was in the hospital earlier this week. I was concerned about him and I thought about the contribution he made to my life. Also, I want to acknowledge Alexie Arrowmaker, a very distinguished Dene elder. He is known from one end of the valley to the other. I want to thank him for simply mentioning me by name at the signing of the agreement-in-principle in Rae. This man is very difficult to get acknowledgement

from. In all the years that I have served, I think he has acknowledged me twice. I want to thank him and I want him to know that I noticed it.

I want to talk to the youth. In Deline I heard a young woman rise in frustration, fear and anger to say, "If self-government is not going to keep my family at home, if it is not going to get my people to stop drinking, if self-government is not going to help give me a stable home and if it is not going to do anything about alcoholism and drug abuse and violence, then why do I want self-government?" There is anger out there. They want to know, what is this government going to do for us? Where is this better life? Who is going to work on it? And why is it that they have to choose between this government and aboriginal governments?

I know the women, the children and the youth are the most vulnerable; they need a commitment from us to do something for them. I want to do that. What is my message today? It is that all my life, all I ever wanted was a better life for myself, for my family, my relatives, for the Dene, and it grew to the Metis, to the Inuvialuit and all northern people. That is my commitment. By being in this government, serving as your Premier, I will set some measurable and achievable targets to make life better for all of us: for all women, for our families, for our youth, for our elders, for our children, for our teachers, for those people that work for us. That is how I want to do it. That is what I want to do.

There is a new beginning. Some of us have been elected for the first time; some of us have been re-elected. People should have confidence that we are going to do something, that we will achieve something. I would like to suggest that I have the confidence, the experience, the conviction and the strength to deliver that with you to the people of the North.

We have two women elected to this Legislature. I know Jane Groenewegen from Hay River is prepared to serve as a Member of Cabinet. Capable, strong, determined, principled people like Jane must be given an opportunity to serve. I point her out because she more than anybody has put so much on the line in order to serve people and the public in the last term.

I want all of you to know specifically that this individual has my full support and endorsement. These are the kinds of people I want to see on Cabinet: strong people, people that do not owe anybody anything out there. People that are not going to be patronizing friends, people who are going to work for the interests of everyone. We will be committed to being accountable, and to being strong members of a team. This is what we need. We need to work together so that every community in the valley and region can be assured that we will try to get something for them.

We are not going to come here to just meet and talk. Give us some targets, give us some objectives and we will work to achieve them.

A teachers' strike is pending now. I want to mention a letter I received from a constituent, Jill Taylor, from Norman Wells. It is a very moving letter, a letter that compels me to ask what is going on in the hearts and minds of our teachers. What compelled them to go on strike? What is it? Do we really understand what is going on in their hearts and their minds? Is there something we can do to come closer together again? I just want you to know that I read the letter and it is staying on my desk and I hope we can do something to resolve the differences we have. We do not have any money. We are going into a

massive deficit but we still have the will. We will look at the issues and try to come together somehow, to address the needs that we all have.

We cannot abandon each other simply because there is a lack of money. We need to compromise and we need to reach out and try to understand one another. We are prepared to do that in every instance. There is a Minister of Youth. We need to reach out to the youth and let them know there is a portfolio assigned to a Minister. This Minister can find some way to reach out to the youth and to see what it is this incredibly fast growing segment of our population need and want. What is it they see for the future? Over the years, I worked in many capacities. More than anything, I have always believed that I can do things. I am an ordinary person with some wonderful opportunities that I have seized and wonderful people I have worked with... capable people. That has been the secret: finding opportunities, seizing them and finding the right people to get the job done. And it did not matter if it was in Good Hope, if it was in the Dene Nation, or if it was in the different ministerial assignments that I have had over the years. That has always been the secret to achieving results.

I think we can do that with aboriginal governments. Mr. Antoine has led the way in developing a position, along with Mr. Dent and myself, to agree that we will share lands and resources with aboriginal peoples and aboriginal governments in the North that will embody a Northern Accord. This will give us the assurance that when it is time to be established and set up, they will have the respect, the integrity and the financial capacity to be independent and to be equals.

In the meantime, this government must continue to have the respect of people because it is serving everyone. They all elected us here. There will come a day when some of our people will choose to go with aboriginal governments. We must prepare for that as well. I have been there.

I have worked as hard as anyone to get recognition of aboriginal rights. As a strong supporter of claims and self-government agreements, my track record is there. Of course, some of you have said, not everybody is happy with you. That is true. The Premier will know; people call for resignations on a moments notice. It is difficult to keep everybody happy. One thing is certain, my enemies, if there are any, (and I will not concede there is even one), will always do their worst. But, I tell you; I will always do my best.

There is a need to recognize the support of the chiefs, the Métis leaders that I received. They may not be as vocal as others, but they are there. I have worked for years as president of the Dene Nation. I have served with aboriginal people. I have been elected since 1987 for the Sahtu riding. I have been elected by each Legislature that I have served on to be a Minister. That tells you I can get the job done, I can get along with people and maybe I do not smile enough. That has been a criticism. People have called me names – called me Stoneface. It is true. But that is the way I am, maybe because of the traumas I have had. Let me tell you, I work hard at trying to smile all the time...it does not come easy. But I am working on it, as my children would say.

There are many things that I know I can do better. But I do have a good record for getting things done. There will be compassion, compromise and moral commitment to sit down with every group in the Territory. People that support the Deh Cho proposal who could sit down and make a commitment.

What is it that we can do to help get the respect and recognition the proposal deserves? What about the Yellowknives Dene First Nation? When has anybody ever sat down and said, "Okay, for the next three days, we are going to sit and talk about this until some of your concerns, interests, and issues are addressed." We need to make some commitments. We need to focus one at a time on achievable results.

There are many other things that could be said but I think the main message today is simple. I want a better life for everyone. I want to work so that we have a good future. We do that through making sure this government is a good government.

We make sure this government is accountable, that it has the resources and the lands necessary to be independent and provide the same for aboriginal governments for the day when some of us choose to live under that government. This is what the people of the North expect and I believe that is what we can deliver.

Thank you.