

Minister's Statement 111-14(6): Department Of Executive

HON. STEPHEN KAKFWI: *Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss in my duties as Premier if I did not take time during this final session of the 14th Legislative Assembly to acknowledge the efforts and achievements of a department that does not receive a great deal of recognition in this House, but one which is nonetheless instrumental in ensuring the overall coordination and management of government – the Department of Executive.*

In my capacity as Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, and with the unflagging services of the Department of Executive, Cabinet has succeeded in placing the NWT on the national stage, raising our profile with our federal, provincial and territorial counterparts and, most importantly, establishing the linkage between a booming economy and the benefits to the nation. This positioning has helped to influence the growing national recognition that the territorial government must have greater access to revenues generated here, if we are to reach our goal of economic self-sufficiency. Meetings of First Ministers were used to build alliances with provinces and territories and unanimous support for devolution was gained from all.

On the intergovernmental relations front, we also worked hard to establish a solid working relationship with our northern partners. We signed a bilateral MOU with the Yukon, as well as a trilateral MOU amongst the three territories. Strengthening our northern voice has assisted in raising awareness about northern issues and the challenges northern governments face. For example, the unified approach that we northern Premiers took at the First Ministers meeting was critical in ensuring an additional \$20 million per territory for health care, as well as convincing Canada that per capita funding for federal programs does not help the territories, where populations are small and program delivery costs are huge.

Our relationship with Premiers across the country has never been stronger and it has resulted in their support for devolution and initiatives such as the national diamond strategy. Furthermore, we will be hosting the 2004 annual Western Premiers conference in Inuvik next July. One important role played by the Department of Executive is the corporate leadership and government-wide support offered to departments. Managers in the Executive chair interdepartmental committees whose purpose is to ensure that information is shared, to promote excellence in their respective fields and to solidify cross-departmental relationships.

The department assists with the development of the strategic, policy and communications aspects of overall government-wide strategies such as the energy strategy, maximizing northern employment, the social agenda and the development of the national diamond strategy – a strategy developed by all provinces and territories and spearheaded by the NWT and Quebec.

As well, the Executive provides leadership in communicating about the government's agenda. The Executive produces the monthly Bear Facts newsletter, to keep our public service informed and connected. It manages the GNWT's Web site and visual identity program. As well, it provides an exemplary protocol service for visiting dignitaries from all over the world. In the past four years, we have planned or played host to over 50 protocol events, ranging from the visits of foreign ambassadors, high commissioners and consul generals to those of Canadian foreign service officers, heads of diplomatic missions and Canadian high commissioners, ambassadors and federal Ministers. With

each visit come an opportunity to promote an increased understanding of the NWT, its goals and aspirations and the opportunities we have to offer. Through its Cabinet Secretariat, the Executive provides quality advice and analysis that is intrinsic to the Cabinet decision-making process. The thorough examination of all matters and issues that were brought before Cabinet is another assurance that sound decision-making, based on solid information and analysis, remains a cornerstone of governmental processes.

The Executive has provided corporate human resource support through the delivery of a number of innovative programs. The management assignment program, designed to help develop skills of existing employees to better prepare them for management and senior management is now underway. We had 101 applications this year. This group was reduced to 29 who are in the final assessment phase. Twenty will join the existing five participants. This innovative program is one means of providing training and career advancement opportunities within our public service.

A new employee recognition program was launched. It updated the long service and retirement programs, added departmental recognition programs and introduced the Premier's Award for Excellence, which celebrates excellence in public service. We have honoured the recent recipients of this award during this session. Additionally, we have made strides in standardizing GNWT training in both human resources and in general management skills areas such as staffing and writing decision papers. These training opportunities are being delivered in all regional centres on a regular basis.

In terms of building the public service of tomorrow, highly successful student and graduate employment programs have been put in place. The graduate employment program, in place for the past two years, has seen over 200 new graduates of diploma and degree programs find initial employment in the NWT in their fields of study. A good cross-section of communities were represented among the graduates and placements. Over 90 percent of these graduates remained in relevant jobs following their initial placements. On the student side, increased coordination has resulted in over 300 students hired in each of the last two summers, one-third of whom were regional placements.

To support staff retention, we introduced a standard exit interview process for those changing jobs or leaving government. The first year of this new process has been completed and a report released on the results. These results will help the GNWT to become an even better employer and improve the retention of our valuable staff. We have also done a variety of things to improve coordination and consistency in human resource practices across government. This has resulted in regular sharing of information among human resource officers and managers, regular reporting to deputy ministers and improved guidelines and procedures in a number of areas including a complete overhaul of the staffing procedures.

Mr. Speaker, the staff members of the Department of Executive are a hard-working and dedicated group of employees whose talents help ensure the continued smooth operations of the machinery of government. It has been my pleasure to work with them as Premier and I thank them again for their efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.