



PRESS RELEASE:

NWT Businesses Want A More Balanced Approach To Protecting Public Health And Supporting Economic Recovery

Yellowknife, NT – June 25, 2020 – Five professional associations representing the majority of businesses in the Northwest Territories call on the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) to work collaboratively to strike a better balance between public health requirements and plans to safely re-open the economy.

In the Northwest Territories, swift and effective actions have been successful at preventing the spread of COVID-19. By essentially putting the NWT into an induced coma for its own protection, there have been no active cases of COVID-19 since April 6, 2020.

We applaud the initial responses of the CPHO and some of the initial economic relief that the GNWT was able to provide. Nevertheless, the NWT's strong COVID-19 response has come at a heavy price and it is getting worse every day with businesses and their workers suffering the effects:

- Our tourism and hospitality industries are barely clinging to life;
- Our minerals industry is struggling and one of our mines has already closed; and
- Our aviation industry is besieged and hoping to survive.

Prolonging this induced coma is having calamitous effects and we now need urgent action in order to preserve businesses and ensure the survival of the private sector.

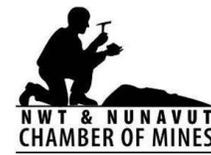
In an economy dominated by government, we fear there is no sense of urgency. Two weeks into Phase 2 of Emerging Wisely and the Government of the Northwest Territories' response has been woefully out of step with the private sector. GNWT workers remain on full pay with no consequences to their personal incomes, household costs, or pensions (which we note, are largely supported by the taxes paid by the Northern and Indigenous-owned businesses that we represent).

The GNWT has shown no initiative in adapting to Phase 2 restrictions while virtually all its employees continue to work from home where that is possible.

The NWT business community is leading the way in adapting to Phase 2 restrictions by re-opening safely in the face of an opaque and restrictive public health regime.

It is time now to bring the economy out of its coma. To this end, we call on the GNWT and the CPHO to work collaboratively to strike a better balance between public health requirements and the requirement that the economy safely re-open. This includes:

- Revealing to the public what the economic price tag to date on the NWT has been and any economic forecasting the GNWT has performed;
- Easing travel and quarantine restrictions for those entering the territory, even if not uniformly across the NWT;
- Welcoming GNWT employees back to the workplace in a manner consistent with the private sector;
- Providing consistent and prompt answers from the CPHO on how her office will interpret rules and grant exemptions to those rules;
- Ensuring consistent and accurate messaging regarding the public health emergency.



The GNWT relinquished many of its governing responsibilities at the outset of this pandemic. The decision-making authority of the CPHO can no longer take place in a vacuum. Businesses in the Northwest Territories are doing their best to survive. Our elected officials need to step up and govern lest we see irreparable damage to our once vibrant business community.

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