



10 ideas to help avoid needless layoffs

(YELLOWKNIFE) May 8, 2008 - Yellowknife Centre MLA Robert Hawkins releases a list of 10 ideas to help the GNWT solve its financial difficulties and to help avoid mass layoffs.

It has been about seven months since the election and four months since regular MLA's have been informed as to the degree of the territorial financial position. It has become clear that this government needs to exercise more imagination in dealing head-on with its fiscal challenges. The GNWT has proposed to eliminate programs and to cut staff as its response, which in the views of many, is the "easy" answer lacking political will and imagination.

The potential crisis we are facing is not at the doorsteps of the Assembly and this worst-case scenario is a number of years away. It is the concern of many that the options presented are limited and fast tracked without due consideration of any other options that might avoid the layoffs and cuts put forward by the Premier and his Cabinet.

Hawkins stated, "I continue to be disappointed by the lack of imagination of this government by not examining a greater range of options that might be available. Cuts at times are necessary and demonstrate that an organization is willing to look within to ensure it is healthy and running properly. However, I am concerned that the knee-jerk reaction to deal with this potential problem has caused needless damage to members of the public service and indeed morale in general as well as negatively impacting the image of the territorial government. A thought-out and calculated approach is the only path and that appears to be the one course that is not considered here. It is my opinion that we might still have time to avoid mass layoffs and program cuts if we are willing to work together and try a little harder. That is why I am presenting a list of 10 ideas that could help to avoid layoffs."

1. **Get Canada to move the debt wall.** The territorial debt wall is a number that the federal government sets and I believe we have reached the point that it should be revisited. In essence, the debt wall is considered to be the fundamental source of our financial problems and this would be the natural first place to start. In my view, the GNWT operates fiscally responsible under good financial policies. Therefore, it's time Canada recognizes that and reviews that limit – a limit that was set when the territorial economy was different.
2. **Collect on receivables.** I have been told DIAND owes the GNWT approximately \$100 million for health-related fees and services for First Nations' and Inuit health care coverage. I believe it is time to negotiate a settlement.
3. **Open the door early.** Instead of layoffs, early retirement hasn't been promoted as an option for those people in the public service who are at retirement age or considering other opportunities.
4. **Public Service as a whole.** There has been no discussion to look at a potential government-wide wage freeze, a modest rollback, or hiring freeze. This could open up a discussion to sharing the potential burden among the public sector and we might collectively find a solution instead of letting a few carry the heavy load.



5. **Getting a devolution deal done.** A hard and firm stance on a resource deal needs to finally be taken. Either the federal government is working with us or they are working against us. We have watched those resource dollars flow by long enough. If we strike a deal, we would have something to work from going forward. We need fresh ideas here.
6. **Take a sober second look at our programs.** To date, there has been no clear program review and evaluation that looks at zero-base budgeting of government service levels offered to the public. Let that review be as widely consultative as possible.
7. **Ghost jobs sitting empty.** Immediately stop funding jobs that are not filled. If they are needed, then look at this case-by-case with pool funding.
8. **Give it back.** If the federal government isn't willing to help out during the supposedly best economic times ever in the NWT, then let them deal with some costs. The GNWT should consider options of giving programs back to the federal government if we cannot afford to run them properly.
9. **Boards and Agencies need to run effectively.** It's time to implement the three year-old boards and agencies review. In financially difficult times it would stand to reason that we should be operating more effectively in these areas.
10. **Work with our ability to raise new revenues and start collecting outstanding debts.** It's time to look at new or adjusting revenue sources. We need to take a hard look at ideas like adjustments to corporate tax rate structure to encourage a climate for large tax filers. It is also time to enforce collection on day-to-day debts like Housing Corporations loans and rental money.

“As I'm trying to highlight, a discussion needs to take place about the 'other' options. Not every idea I presented will be right answer for us. But we have to start somewhere. As I listen to people in Yellowknife and across this territory, it becomes increasingly difficult to support a budget that cuts people and programs first before any evaluation of the business of government has taken place. At this moment I am not convinced every option has been exhausted and my support for the budget will be only if the Premier demonstrates that,” said MLA Hawkins.

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