

Independent Members Caucus

DISCUSSION PAPER

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.

~ *Barack Obama*

PURPOSE

To bring back real consensus government through empowering like-minded MLAs to work together, share resources to advance common issues and better hold Cabinet to account.

THE NWT IS FACING REAL CHALLENGES



Crisis in **Housing**

The Northwest Territories' housing crisis is marked by severe shortages, overcrowding, and inadequate infrastructure, disproportionately affecting Indigenous communities and low-income residents.



Crisis in **Healthcare**

The Northwest Territories' healthcare crisis is marked by staff shortages, limited access to specialized care, and aging infrastructure, leaving many Northerners, especially those in small communities, underserved.



Crisis in **Economy**

The Northwest Territories' economic decline is driven by the downturn of its resource industries, aging infrastructure, and limited economic diversification, leading to job losses and financial uncertainty.



Crisis in **Safety**

The Northwest Territories is facing a crime epidemic driven by social and economic challenges, with high rates of violent crime, substance abuse, and strained policing resources, particularly in remote communities.

2025-2026 BUDGET



2.5B

2.35B

150M

\$2.5 Billion

That’s the total operating expenditures for the GNWT’s 2025-26 budget.

\$2.35 Billion

That’s how much money the GNWT is spending on its bureaucracy.

\$150 Million

That’s how much the GNWT is spending on the the priorities of the 20th Legislative Assembly. 6% of the total budget.

COMPETING PRIORITIES

MLA priorities should be the **ONLY** priorities of the GNWT. The political machinery of government that drives decision making has been handed over to senior officials rather than elected leaders.

Results and Delivery should be the only priority of public servants. Unelected officials should not be setting the mandate of government.

IT'S A NUMBERS GAME

Any parliamentary or legislative system comes down to voting. Voting is how decisions are made and business gets done. In voting procedures the side with the most votes wins.

Consensus Government is incorrectly referred to as a “perpetual minority government”. This is because minority governments only exist when other parties hold them to account.



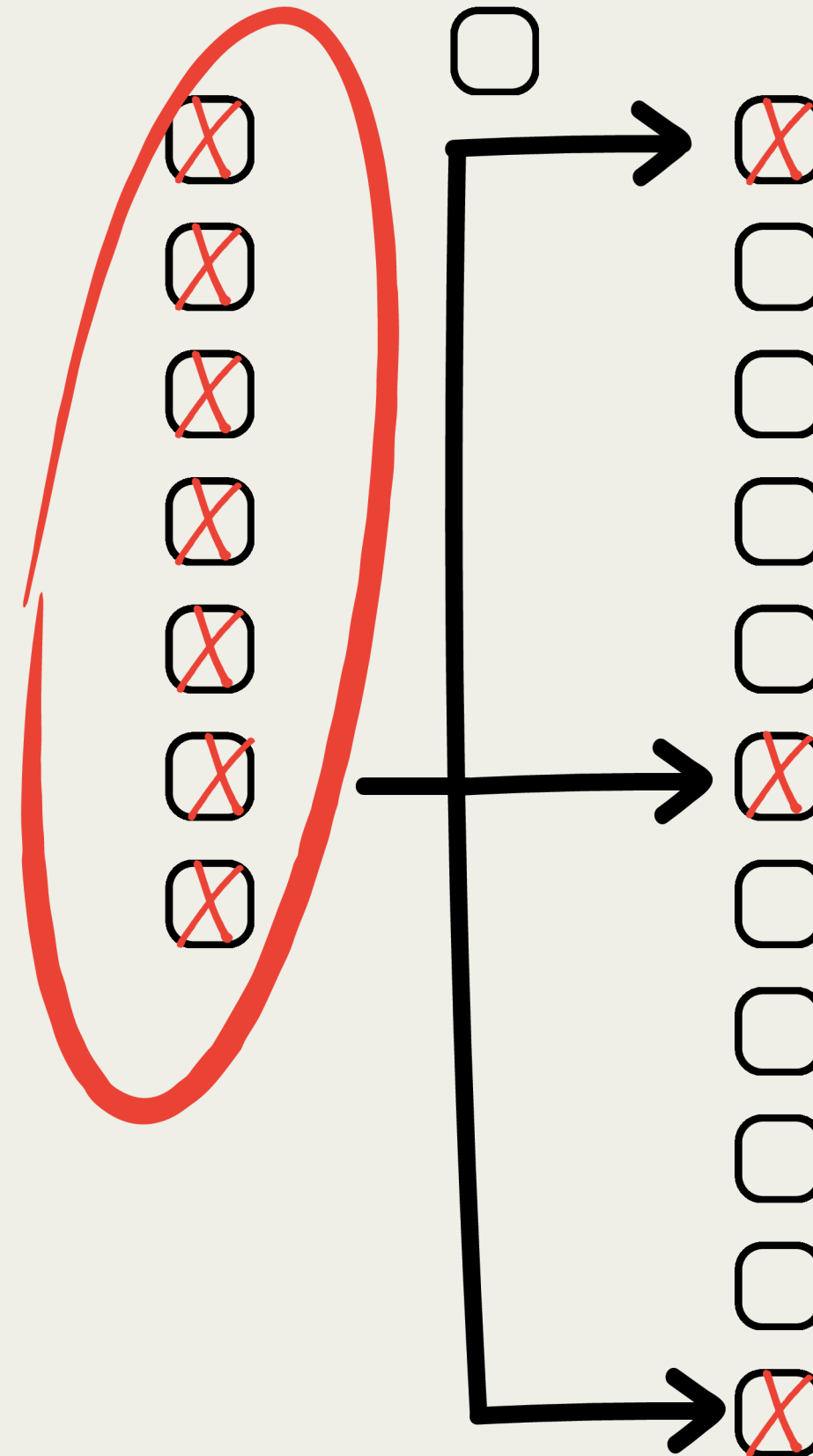
Cabinet Solidarity

Cabinet solidarity is a constitutional convention in parliamentary systems where all members of the cabinet must publicly support and defend government decisions, even if they privately disagree.

In practice this means Cabinet has seven votes at all times when it comes to spending and legislation.

All it takes is for two member to tie a vote or three to win.

CABINET + 3 = MAJORITY GOVERNMENT



Regular Members

Independent MLAs must secure nine votes to pass legislation, motions and change proposed spending.

Independent MLAs have limited to no incentives to build voting coalitions, lacking access to monies, appointments, travel and other resources afforded to Cabinet.

CONSENSUS GOVERNMENT IS NOT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

After a Chief and Council election, there is an expectation that everyone will work together and stand by the new leadership. But our system is not the same.

Cabinet is in the tent, and regular members are on the outside looking in. We are not welcomed at the same table and we do not work together like a band or municipal council.

The Legislative Assembly is a parliamentary system and requires more accountability than local governments.

Without a clear alternative to the government, the role of cabinet and non-cabinet members are blurred. This often leads to a chilling effect on public criticism of government officials and decision makers.

MLAs are more concerned about who they are working **with**, rather than who they are working **for**.

INDEPENDENT CAUCUS

MLAs are proposing establishing an independent caucus to share their constituents' views, discuss policy, plan parliamentary strategy and help develop caucus positions on subjects being debated in the House.

Caucus provides a forum in which Members can debate their policy differences among themselves without compromising unity. A caucus usually does not vote on issues before it, but instead, discussion proceeds until a consensus is reached.

**Member-driven / Community-focused /
Pooled-resources / Shared-experience /
Trust & Collaboration**



DISADVANTAGES TO CURRENT SYSTEM

No Membership Choice

MLAs did not choose to be members of the standing committee on accountability and oversight (AOC) where house affairs are discussed and decided. This inhibits solidarity and unity on policy and parliamentary strategy.

No Political Staff

Legislative Assembly staff are frequently placed in situations where they are asked to provide political advice on house business and strategy. This is an unfair burden to place on non-partisan public servants.

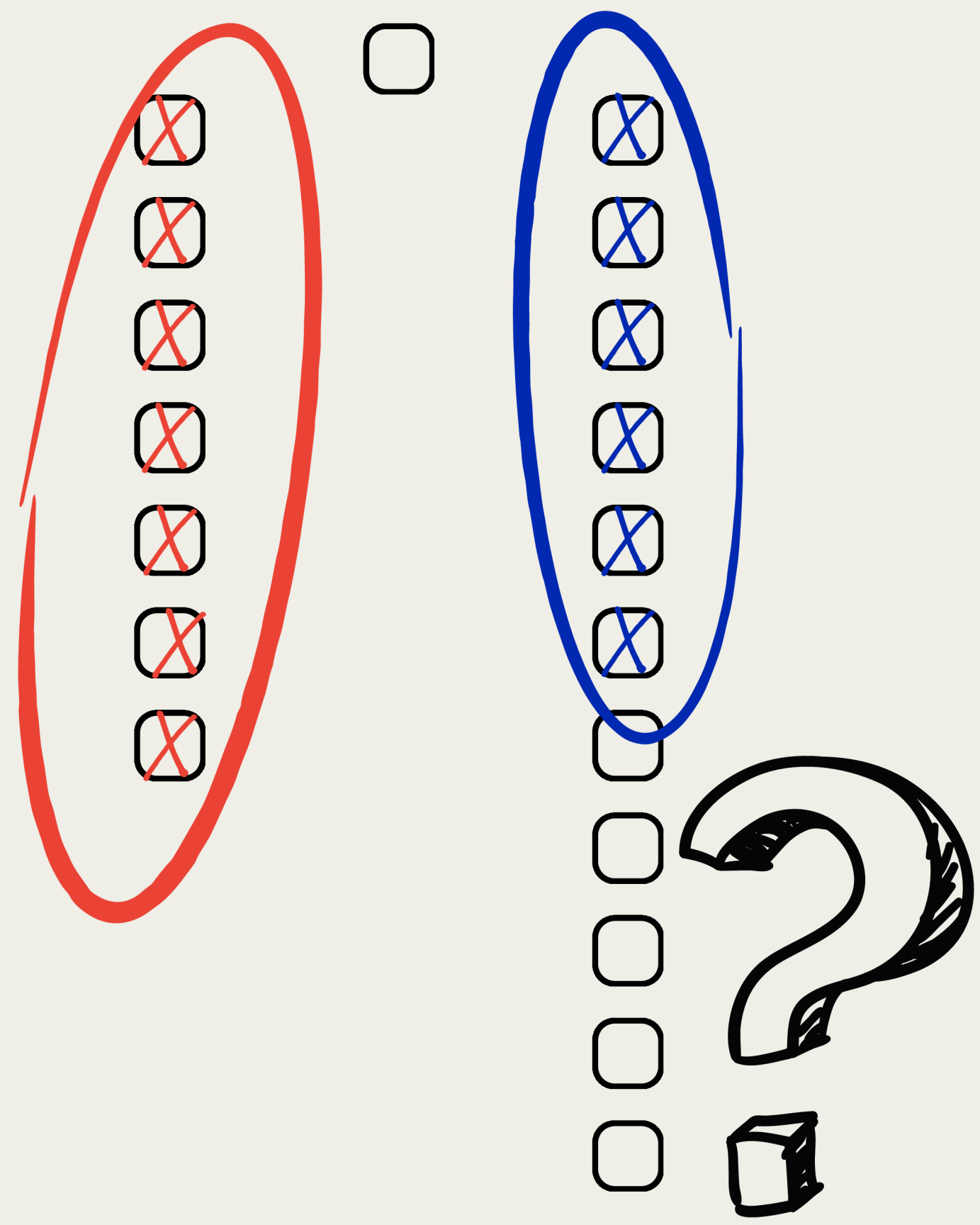
No Meeting Flexibility

AOC has an expansive mandate that includes review of all proposed government legislation and the business of supply. Political decision making takes time away from committee business, resulting in a greater frequency of meetings and a substantial time commitment for MLAs.

No Policy Alternatives

Committees do not possess the mechanisms nor resources to develop alternatives to government policy. This results in stagnant policy processes, delayed legislative initiatives and unwillingness to consider alternatives to the GNWT's proposals.

CHANGING THE NUMBERS GAME



Independent Members Caucus

This group of MLAs would act as a counter-balance to the Cabinet, offering members an opportunity to vote together as a bloc.

Other Members

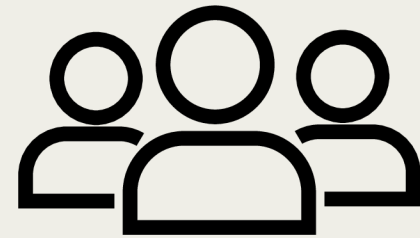
Other MLAs would remain independent.

INDEPEDENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT

20th Legislative Assembly Priorities

- Suitability, accessibility and affordability of housing;
- A strong economic foundation;
- Access to health care and addressing the effects of trauma; and
- Safe residents and communities.

Cabinet

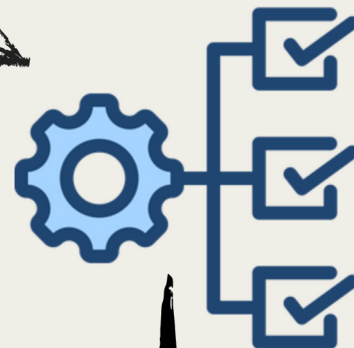


Independent Members Caucus



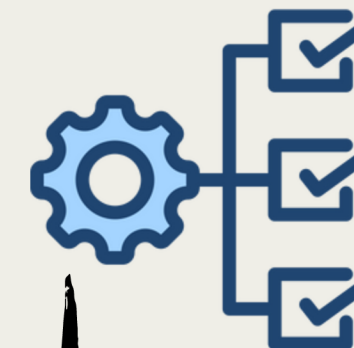
GNWT Mandate

- Housing
- Economy
- Access to health care
- Addressing the effects of trauma
- Emergency management
- Public safety



MLA Mandate

- Housing
- Economy
- Healthcare
- Public Safety



If the current system was
working, then we wouldn't
be having this discussion ...

WE NEED TO ACT NOW

- Our message is not getting through to decision-makers
- Priorities are not being actioned by the government.
- Committees are being ignored by the departments they oversee.

We need a real
breakthrough to make
progress.

IT'S BEEN DONE BEFORE

Prior to division in 1999, Nunavut MLAs sat in an informal Eastern Arctic caucus. The 10 members worked together as a voting bloc to support areas of mutual interest.

Even though this group was not the majority of members, the Eastern Arctic Caucus commanded significant influence over the entire Assembly through voting power, solidarity and unity.

CHOICE NOT DEMAND

MLAs are invited to participate in this concept in the spirit of democratic renewal and political empowerment.

Participation will not upset the workings of Cabinet, AOC, Caucus or the Legislative Assembly at this stage.

However, consequential changes may be sought in the future by an Independent Caucus.

- Rules Changes
- Board of Management Funding
- House Seating

Thank you!

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

CONFIDENTIAL