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MLA calls federal failure to name new a commissioner unacceptable

Julie Green calls on Ottawa to appoint somebody to replace George Tuccaro

John McFadden
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SOMBA K'E/YELLOWKNIFE

A Yellowknife MLA is calling on the federal government to name a full-time replacement for former NWT commissioner George Tuccaro.

Tuccaro retired from the position on May 10 of last year.

Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green said she does not know why Ottawa is dragging its heels on the issue. In the meantime, the role has been filled by deputy commissioner and Inuvik resident Gerald Kisoun.

Green said she has asked Premier Bob McLeod for a status update on the naming of a new commissioner but was told that he knows no more about it than she does.

"For whatever reason (the federal government) is being incredibly slow about doing this," she said.

"When George Tuccaro was the commissioner he took on a public relations and promotions role for the NWT which many people appreciated. But that is not being done at the moment."

According to the NWT commissioner's website, the commissioner is considered the chief executive officer for the territory.

Responsibilities of the position include swearing in MLAs, appointing ministers at the advice of the premier, giving final assent to new laws, and representing the territory at ceremonies and events.



Commissioner George Tuccaro retired from the position on May 10 of last year. - photo courtesy Government of the Northwest Territories.

Duties of the commissioner

- Swearing in members of the legislative assembly
- Swearing in members of the executive council under the recommendation of the members of the legislative assembly
- Appointment of ministers or members of the executive council to ministerial portfolios on the advice of the premier

"Are we going to celebrate our 150th birthday in this territory without a commissioner who is going to take a lead role in that celebration?" asked Green.

"It's unacceptable and there is no reason for it. The federal government has a list of many worthy people – both men and women, aboriginal and non-aboriginal – to choose from."

Green said she understands the feds are bringing in a new process for the appointment, including a vetting process for those who apply, but argued existing protocol should be used for now.

She said she expects the NWT legislative assembly to break in the fall, meaning that when it returns there will be a new commissioner's address outlining the government's latest priorities and she would like to see the new full-time commissioner – preferably a woman – give that address.

"Women are so underrepresented in leadership in the NWT," she said.

"Where we only have one woman in cabinet – why not have another woman in a leadership role?"

Green was quick to point out that the day-to-day business of the territorial government has not been adversely affected by the position sitting vacant.

The commissioner does give royal assent to bills and legislation but Kisoun has been doing that in his role as deputy commissioner.

Yellowknifer asked Andrew Livingstone, spokesperson for cabinet, what the premier knows about the commissioner appointment status.

"As we've said before, the appointment of a new commissioner is a responsibility of the Government of Canada and it would be best to talk to them for an update," he stated in an e-mail.

Yellowknifer reached out to NWT MP Michael McLeod, the Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs and the Privy Council for a status update on the appointment of a new commissioner. None had responded as of press time.

- Providing assent for bills after they have been passed by the legislative assembly
- Opening sessions of the legislative assembly
- Signing of documents such as orders-in-council, commissioner's warrants, statutory appointments and disposition of commissioner's lands
- The commissioner also performs a ceremonial role by representing the Government of the Northwest Territories at official and landmark events across the NWT



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