

Idlout shows NDP is at the grown-ups' table



Corey Larocque

Lori Idlout got herself a seat at the grown-ups' table, but the Nunavut MP still owes an explanation for her — and the NDP's — change of heart on Justin Trudeau's Liberal government.

Idlout, a rookie New Democrat elected six months ago, was

front and centre April 1 when the prime minister announced \$214 million to improve Iqaluit's municipal water system.

Trudeau led the virtual show from Ottawa, but the announcement included heavyweights Northern Affairs Minister Daniel Vandal and Nunavut Premier P.J. Akeagok. Iqaluit Mayor Kenny Bell was present, too.

Typically, opposition MPs aren't included in government funding announcements.

On March 4, when Liberal housing minister Ahmed Hussen announced \$45 million to build 101 housing units in Nunavut, it was just him, Vandal and Nunavut housing minister Lorne Kusugak.

A week later, when Vandal announced \$2 million for seven projects in the territory, including a soup kitchen in Taloyoak and a ball diamond in Kugluktuk, it was all him.

Liberal ministers made a string of announcements last August — days before Trudeau plunged the country into a snap summer election campaign. Cabinet ministers Vandal, Hussen and Catherine McKenna jetted around Nunavut, sprinkling public money around.

At the time MP Mumilaq Qaqqaq, also a member of the NDP caucus, was nowhere to be seen.

So, what's changed?

The Liberals and NDP jumped into bed together in March, after working out a deal that will see the NDP prop up the Liberals in the House of



Nunavut's NDP MP Lori Idlout (bottom right) took part in a government funding announcement April 1 with Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (bottom left), Liberal Northern Affairs Minister Daniel Vandal (top right), Premier P.J. Akeagok and Iqaluit Mayor Kenny Bell (both top left). (Screenshot courtesy of the City of Iqaluit/Facebook)

Commons until 2025.

Idlout's inclusion in the April 1 announcement is a sign of the price Trudeau's Liberals will have to pay for NDP support. Liberals will be sharing the limelight with New Democrats.

The new Liberal-NDP partnership should be uncomfortable for both sides. But it should be especially awkward for Idlout, who has roundly criticized Trudeau's Liberals for a track record of broken promises.

Nunatsiaq News has quoted Idlout at least five times since last summer, railing against the Liberal government for having broken its promises since 2015.

Now that the NDP has a seat at the table, it's going to be impossible for her to keep singing from the "broken promises" song sheet. New Democrats now either have to acknowledge the Liberal government is making good on promises, or acknowledge that Liberal failures are their

failures too. Idlout still owes constituents an explanation for her change of heart.

Nunavummiut did not vote for the Liberal agenda last September. Two-thirds voted NDP or Conservative. However, now they have an NDP representative helping deliver the Liberal agenda.

When Nunatsiaq News asked Idlout on the day Trudeau and NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh announced the partnership to explain her change of heart,

her party's communications department said Nunavut's MP "won't be able to do this today."

Instead, the party's communications shop offered a prepared statement hailing the Liberal-NDP deal as a boon to people struggling with the cost of living and lack of housing. Liberals need the NDP's help because "left to their own devices, the Liberals are getting us nowhere."

The prepared statement did not address why an MP who bashed the government's record of broken promises suddenly gave that same government a longer leash.

The NDP is now in the game. But what are New Democrats going to do with their new-found clout? How will they beat the "Liberal broken promises" drum when they're now associated with the government?

There's no hurry for Idlout and other New Democrats to answer. They've got four more years to think it over.

Mary Simon shares wisdom at Queen's University

Governor General gives virtual talk as part of Distinguished Speaker series

Meral Jamal

Gov. Gen. Mary Simon recalls that growing up in Nunavik as the child of an Inuk mother and non-Inuk father was an experience of "walking between worlds" that has helped her connect with Canadians, and connect Canadians with each other.

"During my life, I would ... [use] my knowledge of one to benefit the other, always with the goal of improving Inuit life," said Simon, giving her perspective as part of a virtual conversation called "Through the Eyes of the North: Our Collective Responsibility" at Queen's University Tuesday.

Her talk was part of the Distinguished Speaker series, hosted by the university's school of policy studies.

Speaking in English

and French, Simon spoke about milestones and the role of reconciliation moving forward. Noting Pope Francis' recent apology for the abuse experienced by survivors of the residential school system, she said such words "must be followed with action."

"Reconciliation is not a project, nor does it have an end date," Simon said. "We must always strive to acknowledge the pain and the truth of our history."

She also stressed the importance of policymaking in furthering reconciliation, pointing to systemic issues in the North such as food insecurity, lower education levels, incomes and life expectancy, and high suicide rates.

"For too long, policies were imposed by asking, 'What do we think is best for Inuit people? For Indigenous peoples?'" Simon said.

"We need to rephrase that question: 'What do Inuit people believe is the best course for themselves?' One question takes agency away. The other gives it back."

Bob Watts, former interim executive director of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and adjunct professor at Queen's, also took the time to ask Simon about her thoughts on climate change.

In response, Simon spoke of the role Indigenous knowledge plays in giving climate and environment scientists more than one knowledge base to work from.

"Part of the solution [to climate change] is to not always just acknowledge Indigenous knowledge in documents and reports, but to actually work with people that are working in those [communities]," she said.

Established by Tom Courchene, the inaugural director of the school of policy studies at Queen's,

the Distinguished Speaker series aims to engage faculty, students, policymakers, politicians and other opinion leaders in discussions on major

policy issues.

Past speakers include former justice minister and attorney general Jody Wilson-Raybould, former Truth and Reconciliation

Commission chair Murray Sinclair, and Natan Obed, president of Inuit Tappariit Kanatami, the national organization representing Inuit in Canada.

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