

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

WIIILIDEH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE COURSES

February 18, 2016

Monsieur le président, je prends la parole aujourd'hui afin de souligner la popularité et le succès d'un cours donné ici à Yellowknife, qui encourage la compréhension de la culture autochtone et une plus grande utilisation de la langue autochtone.

The 6-week Wiiliideh Language and Culture Course is delivered to a class of about 15 students from classrooms in Dettah and Ndilo. Wiiliideh language instructor par excellence Mary Rose Sundberg is teacher. Now in its third year, popularity has grown to the point where organizers are getting about four times as many applications as there are seats available. Enrollment is open to all comers—students include government workers, business employees and even YKDFN citizens who want to learn more about their own culture and take part in a high quality community event.

The course was developed by Aurora College instructor Hugh Moloney. Returning from a year in New Zealand with his family several years ago, Hugh was impressed with a course he witnessed there that went beyond mere language instruction to explore the roots of language in culture and traditions.

The premise is that by learning language, the learner will be better equipped to understand the culture. A language course is far more than the words learned: it is a window into the landscapes, the experience and the people who speak the language. Through the process of learning the language, the student gains an appreciation of the culture and the ability to understand why people think and act the way they do. Language acquisition enables the learner to build new relationships, and strengthen cross-cultural ties.

Judging by the program popularity, students thirsty for cultural knowledge agree. So far, the program has been offered free of charge. While a similar program is available in Ft. Smith, the program has served to pilot the approach of cultural exploration as the basis of language instruction. We're seeing what's worked here, and we could profit from this knowledge elsewhere.

I want to congratulate Aurora College, course developer Hugh Moloney and instructor Mary Rose Sundberg on this highly successful offering. I commend

these lesson to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment for the possible development of similar offering for other languages and regions. This government spends a lot of money and effort on promoting the preservation and growth of Aboriginal languages—and rightly so! Here’s a model that’s working to not just spread language use but build bridges of cultural knowledge and understanding. Let’s pick it up and run with it.