

## MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

### FUTURE OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

February 18, 2016

**MR. O'REILLY:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take some general comments today on the future of the Northwest Territories. The proposed of the mandate tabled yesterday in this House and the Commissioner's opening address provided Cabinet's assessment of our fiscal situation, which is not shared by all in this Assembly.

We have inherited new authority and jurisdiction under devolution. We must use our resources very wisely to ensure that we do not take away opportunities for future generations, but also maximize the retention of benefits for our residents today.

The federal government did not review revenues from these resources for many, many years. As part of the devolve-and-evolve approach, we need to thoroughly examine whether the Northwest Territories is getting a fair return for the use and extraction of these public resources.

We also need to ensure that there is some benefit to future generations from this non-renewable natural capital through a defined revenue stream into our Heritage Fund.

I look forward to a comprehensive and public review of our resource revenues during the term of this Assembly.

Yesterday, we heard from Cabinet about traditional values of thrift and self-reliance. There was another traditional value that was not discussed: sharing. We look after each other here. Those that have share with those that do not have.

Income disparity has steadily grown in the Northwest Territories over the 30 years I have lived here. Despite the high cost of living, there is room for us to better share our wealth within the Northwest Territories, and I will be looking for ways to increase our revenues.

Mr. Speaker, there are sectors of our economy that are enjoying growth, including tourism, arts and crafts, manufacturing, and agriculture. Those are exactly the areas we should be supporting to diversify our economy, to build long-term sustainability, and resiliency.

Now is the time for public strategic investment in these sectors of our economy.

Building large surpluses in the operations and maintenance side of our budget to spend on infrastructure will require cuts to programs, services, and staffing that support our quality of life. Building roads to resources will perpetuate our dependency on non-renewable resources, and the boom and bust cycles of commodities that we cannot control.

If we are to invest in infrastructure, let's invest in our people and a knowledge economy through a university in the Northwest Territories.

There is tremendous global interest in our natural environment, cultural, traditional knowledge, co-management systems, and cold-weather technology. Canada is the only circumpolar country without a university in its north. This is something that I believe the new federal government would support.

This is a kind of vision I had expected to see as part of the proposed mandate. I look forward to the debate in the coming weeks on the future of the Northwest Territories and our fiscal situation.