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**Metis Health Benefits Funding**

**Committee of the Whole—2016-2017 Operating Budget Review**

**Dept. of Health and Social Services —June 13, 2016**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So on the revenue summary I see where, under transfer payments, shows a couple of lines here, hospital care, medical care for status Indians and Inuit. Presumably with the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision on Métis, would we expect to see addition transfer payments from the federal government for Métis healthcare? I think somewhere in here I think I saw the figure of about \$2 million is what we seem to spend on Métis healthcare in a year. Can I ask our witnesses about this, Mr. Chair?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Mr. Minister.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, with the recent ruling of the Supreme Court on Métis health benefits, we're hoping that that is in fact the case, but we actually have no details on how they plan to move forward to address that particular court ruling. We will be following up with the federal government to see what, if any, dollars will flow our way.

The Member is correct, we spend about \$2 million plus dollars a year providing Métis health benefits. So we're hoping that those are the type of dollars we see from the federal government. At this time, we have no indication from them what they intend to do or how they intend to address the Supreme Court ruling. We will monitor and follow-up and let Members know when we know.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I don't want to jump ahead to page 198, but that's where it looks like we spent \$2.08 million last year on Métis health benefits. Can the Minister tell us when we might hear something from the federal government, during 2016-17 or in time for the next budget or do we have any sense at all when we might hear from the federal government on this? How is he following it up as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Mr. Minister.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, some of that will actually be followed up with by the DAAIR and Department of Finance. We have indicated that we're prepared to have a conversation with the Minister of Health, but ultimately it will be discussions between Finance, DAAIR and the federal government. I do meet the Federal Minister of Health and Social Services with all the other health ministers across the country. I believe our meeting is going to be later this summer. I'm confident that this will be a topic of discussion during that meeting as well.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I'm just trying to understand what our government has actually done on this file. Have we actually written to federal Ministers on this issue to find out when it might get resolved and when we might expect to see some money flowing? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Mr. Minister.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, in anticipation of the Daniels ruling, I actually did raise this before the ruling was actually given at the last FPT meeting, and there was certainly interest among all the provincial/territorial Ministers to see that ruling go the way it went and to get some additional dollars from the federal government. At that time, they did not indicate what they would do if the ruling came down as it did. We have discussed this at the Cabinet table and I know that DAAIR and Finance are aware. We're waiting for some indication as to what the federal government plans to do with the ruling. I'm certain we'll be following up with the federal government in short order.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Mr. Chair, I appreciate that the Minister raised the issue at the last Federal/Provincial/Territorial meeting of Health Ministers, but it sounds like we're waiting. I guess I was looking for something a bit more proactive where our Premier or the Minister would actually write to the federal government and put it in writing. Has that happened and, if not, why? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Mr. Minister.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we're just finalizing our Federal Engagement Strategy now to highlight and bring forward issues across the departments, across the government at a federal level, and this is certainly part of that. As I said, I mean I've brought it up with the federal Minister as well as my provincial colleagues, and we'll certainly be bringing it up again at the next meeting. As far as moving forward with DAAIR and Finance, they are aware. Once we finalize our Federal Engagement Strategy, we will move forward accordingly.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Mr. Chair, I don't want to prolong this, but when are we going to get this Federal Engagement Strategy and why does that have to wait for the Minister to write to his federal counterpart? I don't understand what the problem is in picking up a piece of paper and a pen and writing to the Minister saying that we want this resolved, and even doing it in collaboration with other health Ministers. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Mr. Minister

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, as a Cabinet and as a government, I think it's important that we have a coordinated approach when we're dealing with Ottawa so that all the departments are aware of the different issues or priorities that are being brought forth.

This is clearly one of the areas. It's certainly, you know, dependant on how the federal government goes, it could bring some federal dollars into the coffers to help us provide services to residents of the Northwest Territories that we currently fund. We're the only jurisdiction in the country providing Métis health benefits.

It is an issue, I hear the Member. I mean, obviously the Member would like us to move quicker, but we want to make sure we have a coordinated approach when we're dealing with Ottawa so that all the Ministers and Members know the issues that we will be bringing forward in a coordinated way rather than one-offing and having the departments compete against each other at a federal level. This is a priority, this will be something that's going to be dealt with.

Having said that, the federal government has given no indication, as far as we're aware, as to how they intend to respond to the Daniels case. This is a fairly significant ruling for the federal government, it's

going to come with significant costs. Our dollars are, I think, small in comparison to what some of the other jurisdictions are going to be seeking. And I'm not aware of any of the other provinces or territories who have approached. I think everybody's sort of just of trying to figure out what this ruling is going to mean and how we might engage across the country with the federal government.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess the Minister can probably detect some frustration from this Member. I don't know where this Federal Engagement Strategy is. There's been a lot of talk from the Cabinet about this for months. I still don't have an idea about when it's going to be completed. And we already spent \$2 million a year for these health benefits, which people should expect, and that's the way that we've carried out our health care system here for a number of years.

This is not a question of lobbying the federal government anymore. This is a question of the law, that the Supreme Court of Canada has already ruled on this. When is the federal government going to live up to the law and what are we going to do to make sure that they actually do that as well and help pay for these health care services for our residents?

I don't want to wait for a Federal Engagement Strategy. The Minister should be writing to his federal counterpart now. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Mr. Minister.

**HON. GLEN ABERNETHY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I sense the Member's frustration. But I have indicated that we have already raised this at a federal/provincial level. We are certainly on record at the federal/provincial level during our last FPT. We are waiting to see what some of the other provinces and territories want to do, because a united front on this is certainly going to carry more weight than individual fronts.

Having said that, I do know that the Minister of Finance is going to be in Vancouver to meet with the other Ministers of Finance I think it's this weekend coming. And I have assurances that the Minister intends to raise it there as a second avenue to raise and discuss this issue.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's it for me on this. But obviously, I'm not very happy with our failure to act on this a little more quickly. Thank you, Mr. Chair.