

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE

Extended Health Benefits Review

Committee of the Whole—2016-2017 Operating Budget Review

Dept. of Health and Social Services —June 14, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Mr. Chair, I'm glad we have such a cooperative Minister. I've heard, I guess, that there's going to be some sort of extended review of health benefits. You know, when we look at the costs of these, obviously our mains are not covering all of the costs. We have to go for supplementary appropriations. Can the Minister tell us if there are plans to review extended health benefits and how that might roll out? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we have no defined plans at this point in time, but we do know that the cost of extended health benefits, our budget is certainly not meeting our need. The costs are increasing rapidly in this area. We've got, by way of example, an aging population, more and more people being eligible for extended health benefits. The cost is going up.

We're going to have to have the conversation at some point on how we're going to address that shortfall. We've made some indication to the Seniors' Society that we probably want to have some conversation. We don't know what the solutions are at this point, but, you know, we're going to have to have that conversation. We're going to have to have it in this room. We're going to have to have it in committee room. We're going to have to have it in public. I can't say what that looks like at this point. We haven't made that. We haven't done that work on it yet. We do recognize that these costs are growing a lot faster than we anticipated and they're exceeding our budget pretty much every year and growing rapidly. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yes, and I'm sure that the Minister is fully aware of what happened last time extended health benefits was up for review, so my only advice would be to approach this very cautiously. I'm glad to hear that he's prepared to work with Members on this side of the House and committee, standing committee, and so on. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Would the Minister like to respond?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the comment, and I agree. Thank you, Mr. Chair.