

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

INCENTIVES FOR CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION (COR) CERTIFICATION

October 28, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. Mr. Speaker, I'll share a few observations today on the costs to small businesses of ensuring safe workplaces. First a bit of good news. Members may be aware of COR, or the Certificate of Recognition on safety through the NWT Construction Association. It's the occupational health and safety accreditation program that verifies a fully implemented safety and health program meeting national standards, and it's also independently audited. Even though it's voluntary, many NWT businesses have embraced COR certification and risen to meeting those standards.

Following up on a constituent inquiry, I contacted the Minister of Public Works and Services to see whether, when procuring services, points might be awarded in the tender evaluations to firms who have COR certification in place. This would be a kind of financial carrot to recognize the extra costs in meeting the heightened safety standards of COR, and in the best interest of promoting safe workplaces. The Minister replied to say the department is indeed looking at the possibility of building safety certification requirements into tendering processes. So that's good news and supportive of the safety initiative of contractors.

While this is good news from the Minister of Public Works and Services, the Worker's Safety and Compensation Commission seems to be working at cross-purposes when it comes to small businesses. Currently, there is a program called Safe Advantage which will refund a portion of premiums to businesses on the basis of good safety records. However, this refund program is only open to employers whose last three years of premium assessments was \$40,000, and where continuing premiums remain above \$32,000. In replying to my question on this, the Minister Responsible for WSCC pointed out that a recent review of Safe Advantage did not make a recommendation to roll out the refunds to all employers. Some program supports were created to assist businesses with fewer than 20 employees that are not required to develop a formal Occupational Health and Safety Program. Those are good measures, but still, no refund of premiums or real financial incentives for safety in the workplace.

COR certification provides an off-the-shelf, internationally recognized set of standards and competencies smaller firms can use to set up high-quality safety programs. In the end, that's the sort of incentive that we need, COR certification and some sort of off-setting of fees through the WSCC. But safety does have a cost, and a premium refund to businesses who set up COR, no matter what the size, would be a good inducement.

I urge all the Ministers to develop a coordinated approach to promote safety in the workplaces for small business. I'll have questions later today for the Minister responsible for WSCC. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.