

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

ORAL QUESTION 473-18(2): 18TH ASSEMBLY LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

January 31, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. My questions are for the Premier.

Earlier today I spoke of the legislative inertia of Cabinet. We are about a third of the way through our term, and only six bills, of limited consequences, have come forward. Can the Premier explain what is going on with the ambitious Cabinet legislative agenda? Merci, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Premier.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you, I'd like to redirect this question to the Government House Leader, Minister Abernethy.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to recognize that legislation for the sake of legislation should not be a priority of this Assembly. It certainly isn't a priority of the government. We're actually more interested in making sure that we're bringing forward high-quality legislation that best serves the people of the Northwest Territories and reflects our mandate.

As the government house leader, Mr. Speaker, my role is to help shepherd legislation through this Assembly, and, in that role, I had an opportunity to meet with committee early in the life of this Assembly, where I did share a list of potential legislative initiatives for the 18th Legislative Assembly. At that time, I made clear and I'd like to make clear again that this is a planning tool, Mr. Speaker. This is not a defined set or final list of legislation that will be moving forward. This Assembly, as with all previous Assemblies, additional initiatives will be identified and added to the list during the course of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet is not experiencing inertia. There's a significant amount of work to be done. The Member has specifically referenced different legislation, particularly around the devolve and evolve. I can tell the Member right now that the Department of ENR will be moving forward with five LPs on significant pieces of legislation. The Member does know and is aware our legislative process includes coming to committee with a legislative proposal, which is a very thorough document or is a very thorough document in the case of large legislation. We'll be looking for their feedback. Once we get their feedback, we'll be moving forward with drafting instructions and moving forward with the legislation that the Member would like to see. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I had hoped to hear from the Premier as the leader of Cabinet on this, but I'm happy to hear from the House leader. I would have preferred the Premier.

But I'm just not talking about a planning document, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking about the mandate that this House agreed to at the beginning of our term, and, in that mandate

document, there's a number of legislative and regulatory changes that were outlined, one new Act, 13 amended laws, and at least two new regulations. None of these have come forward to date.

Can the Premier -- I guess I'm going to hear now from the House leader -- tell us how the public should judge performance on this part of the mandate?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: The mandate is an incredibly long document with a lot of specific detail, and as a Cabinet, and an Assembly I hope, we continue to be committed to that mandate and are moving forward with those different pieces of work.

Some of these pieces of legislation and some of the work the Member has described is quite large, and, in the first year of the Assembly, we continued to make progress, but we never -- I don't believe -- made a commitment to completing all of this work in the first year of this Assembly. I think that would be impractical.

I can tell the Member today, I can tell all the Members today, we continue to move forward on the mandate items, we continue to develop LPs there are meaningful and will address the challenges and issues people of the Northwest Territories are facing. We look forward to working with committee on those LPs and then bringing forward meaningful and well-drafted legislation in the life of this government.

MR. O'REILLY: I appreciate the response from the government house leader, but we're almost three years into devolution and our government has not changed one word of the mirror legislation that was passed with virtually no public input.

Can the government house leader or the Premier tell this house and the residents of the Northwest Territories when we can expect to have any legislative changes to reflect the promises that were made around devolve and then evolve?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: The Member continues to refer to the devolution process where we had a number of bills that came forward. That process required us to mirror the legislation that existed, and there was a commitment to move forward from that point to devolve and then evolve. As I've already indicated, we have five LPs coming to committee during this sitting from the Department of E&R which are all devolution-related bills. Massive pieces of work, significant input and work required by the departments to get that work done. Once the LPs are approved by committee, we'll set forth drafting instructions at which point the department and Justice will be developing comprehensive legislation that meets the needs of the people of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, I said it once and I'll say it again, legislation for the sake of legislation is not going to meet the needs of the people. We need to make sure that we're providing high-quality legislation, well-researched, well-focused, and meeting the needs of our residents. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the response from the Government House Leader, but I've been waiting for about a third of my term now for some of this important legislation to come forward. Really, waiting to see these legislative proposals

that are going to come forward from the Department, Environment and Natural Resources.

I think what's happening here, Mr. Speaker, is that our government is spending an inordinate amount of time on cost reductions to meet Cabinet's fiscal reductions, slashing public services to fund ill-defined infrastructure projects including department -- this also includes departmental amalgamations that are driven by cost reductions.

Can the Government House Leader confirm that we no longer have the capacity to bring forward legislative changes because of those reductions and amalgamations that were not part of the approved mandate of the 18th Assembly? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out that that's purely an opinion of the Member. The Departments are working hard to move forward legislation. They understand that a significant amount of work has been done. I've had an opportunity to talk to staff within my department, as well as staff within another department, who are committed to getting this work done. The reductions or corrections that have been done in this public service are done with significant discussion, analysis, to make sure that it does not adversely impact the work that needs to be done by this government.

I respect the Member's opinion. I disagree with the Member's opinion. The work is getting done. We have the staff to get it done. We will get it done. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.