

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

LONG-TERM CARE PROGRAMS

February 15, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. In his reply to the Budget Address, the Health Minister referred to the growing numbers facing us in meeting the demand for seniors' long-term care. We know that by 2026, he said, we have to put in 258 long-term care beds. That's \$139,000 in operational costs per bed, for a total of more than \$35 million annually by 2026 to meet the projected demand.

The numbers are taken from the 2015 Northwest Territories Long-Term Care Program Review report. The report provided a detailed analysis of the anticipated demand for long-term care, options for programs, and approaches to meet that demand, and an analysis of the financial resources that would be required. The report contains 11 recommendations for meeting long-term care challenges, including the possibility of private rather than public care facilities. That's an option I don't ever want to see take place, other than through non-profit organizations. We have the recent announcement of 72 long-term care beds to be located in renovated space in the old Stanton Territorial Hospital. Last week, the Health Minister said there were also some plans being developed to add another 48 long-term care beds at Avens.

Helpful progress if there are the funds to do it, but there will still be a very significant shortfall as our population continues to age and despite best efforts to keep people in their homes as long as possible. Where will the money come from?

Apparently not from the federal government. The recently signed Health Care Agreement has reduced funding to our government and an additional \$9.7 million over 10 years dedicated to long-term care, which is barely a drop in the ocean and it would about 2.7% of the annual \$35 million operating cost for the long-term care beds that we need.

Perhaps more crucial than where the money will come from is whether it will come at all. The Health Minister's reference to the long-term care funding crunch was contained in his monologue on the need for budgetary restraint, implying that today's austerity is in preparation for tomorrow's spending. For some years, the most often-heard refrain from this government has been the gloom of a coming financial crisis, all the while accompanied by huge plans for multi-million infrastructure projects, roads to resources, and special warrants for mining property and a shipping company. Cabinet seems to be able to find money for its priorities, but when we will get serious about our social infrastructure deficit? Later today I'll have questions for the Minister of Health.