

**KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE**  
**Reply to Opening Remarks**  
**Committee of the Whole—2017-2018 Operating Budget Review**  
**Dept. of Education, Culture and Employment—February 17, 2017**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to start with some general comments about Education, Culture and Employment. I'll start with our youngest citizens. I've reviewed the business plan for the department, I've reviewed the Main Estimates, and I'm not sure where we are with the mandate commitment towards universal daycare. So I'll have some questions on that. The two-year deadline is coming up very quickly and I'm not sure what's being done by the department from that front.

Now, I'll talk about junior kindergarten implementation, and issues around this continue no matter what the Minister seems to say. There is no clear plan, there are no quarterly reports that he promised to the standing committee, and it's not fully funded despite whatever the government has said. The issue of inclusive schooling funding, Aboriginal languages funding for the junior kindergarten students, busing, those remain unresolved. What we need from this Minister is a clear unequivocal statement that says there's going to be full funding and that, if there are any shortfalls after talking to the district education authorities, I'm prepared to come forward with a supplementary appropriation that will deal with those shortfalls.

That's the kind of commitment and clear statement we need from this Minister, not this we're going to have magical mystery meetings with the district education authorities and try to get them to come up with the money. We need a clear commitment from this Minister. He's going to come forward with supplementary appropriation for any shortfalls.

Now, there still needs to be a lot of work done with Aboriginal Head Start, daycares, Montessori, to look at the implication of introducing JK for these other programs, and I don't see that there has really been much progress made on any of those areas either.

When it comes to the school system, there are reductions in Inclusive Schooling Funding. I'll have questions about that. There are reduction in funding to the education authorities. They are also being told that they need to look into shared administrative services, come up with \$600,000. Look, I'm all for efficiencies, and if it's done in a collaborative fashion, great, but top down I'm not sure this is going to work.

I'm going to move on now to post-secondary education. There are cuts to student financial assistance. Like my colleague said, we have a fantastic program, and my children have benefited from that as well, but I'm concerned about these cuts. They say there's no uptake on the program. Well, all the money has been spent, so I'm not sure what the problem is here, but I'll have questions around that.

Then we get to Aurora College. I don't understand why cuts are being made in our contribution. More than 10 per cent of their budget is being cut while they're preparing a strategic plan and while we're developing an accountability framework.

Why would you make cuts while you're doing these things? It just doesn't make any sense. You put the cart before the horse. I know Cabinet has its Fiscal Reduction Strategy and targets, but that's not a good enough reason to shortchange our post-secondary institutions.

There are, I think, also some issues with continued support for Dechinta and College nordique. I'm glad to hear that there's going to be a post-secondary education legislation brought forward this year; that's long overdue, but that's not where this has to end. We need a post-secondary education strategy for the Northwest Territories that will help move us towards university and a network of learning centres and so on, as I've said in this House.

There is some good news in this budget for this department and I've come to understand a little bit better the increased support for income support for our most disadvantaged people in the Northwest Territories, but as my colleague previous, the honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, mentioned the communications around this has just been terrible. It's taken me a long time to understand, and I don't think the people of the Northwest Territories or the clients that we serve understand some of these changes very well, either.

I'll also have some questions, Mr. Chair, around the Small Community Employment Fund. Good to see more money going into it, but I'm worried we're not going to be able to get that money out the door because, if it remains as a wage subsidy program, that money is not going to get spent. We need to transition that into a job creation program so that there are more jobs available in small communities, get folks retrofitting our housing stock, and so on. There are ways to do this and move it from wage subsidies to job creation.