

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
General Comments
Committee of the Whole—2017-2018 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Executive and Indigenous Affairs—March 2, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I do have some general comments. I guess the thing that I am most concerned about with regard to this new merged department is the progress or lack thereof that we are making on land rights negotiations.

Back on December 9, 2015, when the Premier was running to become the Premier -- I am just going to quote something here. He says, "I propose a joint committee between Regular Members and Cabinet to provide oversight and give direction to our negotiators on files dealing with Aboriginal land and resource agreements. Let's get these land claim agreements completed, all of them, in the life of the 18th Assembly." So those were the words back in December of 2015.

There has been a joint committee that was put together. I know that it does not provide oversight, does not give direction to the negotiators. In fact, when those sorts of things were proposed by the Regular MLAs, they were rejected by Cabinet. This committee has now met a grand total of one time since it was set up, and I am just not sure we are actually moving ahead in a collaborative, constructive way with this.

I know, in the budget last year for Aboriginal and Intergovernmental Affairs, positions were cut, staff positions were cut, and they were directly involved in the negotiations. So, with a diminished capacity, I don't know how we are going to make this deadline of completing them by the end of the 18th Assembly. I note, in the budget this year, that there are five positions out of 46 in Yellowknife that are going to be cut. There is some sort of movement towards a shared services unit, and I guess I will have questions around that, but it's not clear how that will really increase our capacity and ability to continue with negotiations. I am just not sure how that part of the mandate is going to be accomplished. I have heard good words out of everybody in this Assembly, including the Minister, saying how he wants to move ahead with this, but I think the actions speak louder than the words so far -- or, sorry, the inaction speaks louder than the words.

I do have a couple of other matters that I want to pursue with regard to this new amalgamated department. I am wondering about the future of the Public Utilities Board and, indeed, whether it's the intention of this government to get rid of that body. Also, I have some questions around net metering. It's found in our mandate, that there is to be some new direction, some improvements made to net metering, but nothing has been done to date. There is also some continuing work that is needed on establishing government service officers in all of our communities. There are still some that do not have these important staff people that can serve as pathfinders. I think that is about all I have now in terms of my opening remarks, Mr. Chair. Thank you.