

## MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

### CANNABIS LEGALIZATION

September 28, 2017

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. I attended the Department of Justice's public engagement meeting in Yellowknife on September 14<sup>th</sup> on the legalization of cannabis. First of all, I want to say it was one of the better GNWT consultation meetings I have ever attended. Thanks to the Minister. Publicity produced a good turnout; it was well organized and facilitated. The discussion was respectful and informative, with good opportunities to provide informed input and have it recorded for consideration. I won't try to summarize the input, but I will comment on what I heard and see as some of the key issues that we need to address.

Of course, GNWT has a limited range of areas that are under our control, including age of consumption, the distribution system, possession limits, and ability of communities to set their own restrictions. Science indicates that brain development continues until individuals are about 25 years old and that it can be impaired through use of cannabis. We'll need to set our consumption age with this in mind, and ensure that legalization is accompanied by strong public education to inform users of risks and precautions. Likewise, action to properly test, discourage, and penalize impaired driving and restrictions on workplace usage must be developed and publicized.

We have a highly decentralized population with many small communities. Some have set their own additional restrictions on alcohol. I believe communities should have similar authority over cannabis, but should also be provided with balanced information on cannabis risks and benefits.

The current alcohol distribution system would seem to be the best method for the NWT and with some allowance for mail sales and the potential for private dispensaries with knowledgeable and trained staff. Whatever system we establish, it will need to be flexible and adaptable, and also allow for local production of cannabis.

The legalization of cannabis is being driven by our federal government. I believe this is the right direction. We face a serious and complex set of challenges that must be addressed in a coordinated fashion within a short time frame. I have confidence that the public engagement exercise will provide a forum for a variety of concerns, issues, and solutions. I look forward to the compilation of comments, the legislation that our government will develop, and further public review. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.