

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 907-18(2): CANNABIS LEGISLATION

September 28, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My question is for the Minister of Justice, who is responsible for leading our government's efforts on cannabis legalization. We face a unique set of challenges, as I mentioned in my statement earlier today. Can the Minister provide an update of the current state of this work, including the remaining time frame and milestones we can expect? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Justice.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: As this House will know, there have been a series of public meetings, there have been eight through the Northwest Territories, so at this point, the information obtained at those meetings is being collected, along with the information we received online. I understand more than 1,100 responses. I hope to have a "what we heard" document soon and we will, of course, provide that to Members as soon as I have received it. Thank you.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Minister, for that. It sounds like the engagement was well received, and I look forward to getting the compilation of it. I complimented the Minister earlier for the meeting that I attended here in Yellowknife.

Not unlike liquor distribution and sales, our response to cannabis legalization has to take into account that most communities are too small for their own sales outlets. It is likely that some legal arrangement for shipping of products will be needed, and there may be a desire for additional restrictions by local governments. How does the Minister plan to address these complexities with a system that is locally responsive and respectful?

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Yes, we do realize that we do face some logistical challenges that other jurisdictions do not have, and we realize also that we do have challenges in addressing addictions of abuse of alcohol and drugs as it is in the Northwest Territories. We do recognize that some communities may want to have authority to regulate cannabis within the community. My concern, if we should follow that route, is that generally speaking it creates confusion and complexity if you have a patchwork of laws. It would seem to be generally speaking better, and I would have to wait to think about this further to discuss it with my colleagues, is that generally speaking it is better to have a uniform law throughout the jurisdiction. As I say, you could have a patchwork of legislation which may be overly complex.

MR. O'REILLY: I thank the Minister for his reply. The NWT is always complicated, and I am glad to hear that he has been giving some thought to these issues. Another complex element of this undertaking is pricing and revenue. Other jurisdictions have embarked on this legalization in recent years, and there are lessons to be learned. I am just wondering if the Minister can tell us whether his department is doing any research into the experience and lessons of other jurisdictions that have legalized cannabis, and

whether that research might be made public.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Yes, research has been done on the history of this type of legislation in other jurisdictions, I think primarily those in the United States. We are also looking at the models that have been proposed in other Canadian jurisdictions. I know that Ontario has come forth with a model, as has the Province of New Brunswick.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Thanks to the Minister for that. Glad to hear some research is being done. Perhaps that can be rolled into the "what we heard" report. Is there some sort of discussion paper that might accompany it so we can have an informed discussion or debate around that? Lastly, it is my understanding that the initial federal legalization will not deal with edible products or oils. What process will our government use for the regulation of these cannabis products? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Of course, the general legislation will come into effect in July 2018 which will deal with production, distribution, sale, and possession of cannabis. I understand that the regulation of edible cannabis products will follow approximately six months after that date, so we are going to have to see what that legislation looks at before we prepare a response. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.