

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Public Utilities Board
Committee of the Whole—2018-2019 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Executive and Indigenous Affairs—February 22, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. In this section, there is a line item here for Public Utilities Board. In the mandate for the 18th Assembly, one of the commitments is to improve net metering for our residents so that we can try to build more energy self-sufficiency. Have there been any changes in direction to the Public Utilities Board with regard to net metering? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Premier McLeod.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I should point out that this department only provides administrative services to the Public Utilities Board Minister. However, having said that, there has been no further direction to PUB on net metering. We expect that any direction will emanate with the release of the upcoming new energy strategy for the Government of the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Premier McLeod. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks. I appreciate the clarification from the Premier. The mandate commitment reads as follows: "We will support net metering through clear policy direction to the Public Utilities Board to provide certainty to allow customers to recover their investment in renewable energy." It is listed as an item for the executive to deal with.

When I last looked at the draft energy strategy, there was nothing in there about net metering. Are there going to be some changes, then, to the strategy, such that net metering is going to get some kind of new direction? Is that where we are going? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Premier McLeod.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As part of the business planning process, it is our intention to move the responsibility for providing services to the PUB to the Department of Infrastructure, which has the lead on energy matters, and I expect that, once it is housed there, whatever direction to the PUB will emanate from that department. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Premier McLeod. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. That comes as news to me. I never heard that before that the Public Utilities Board is going to be moved to administration or ministerial reporting, or whatever is going to go to Infrastructure. If I have questions, then, about how we are actually going to support net metering, is the Minister then suggesting that I need to ask those of the Minister of Infrastructure? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Premier McLeod.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My understanding is we thought we were responding positively to requests from the standing committees, specifically the Standing Committee on Government Operations. It is my expectation, and I certainly believe that this responsibility is more properly housed within the Department of Infrastructure. I expect the appropriate direction will emanate from that department. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Premier McLeod. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I think I have been to almost all of the Standing Committee on Government Operations meetings -- I am an alternate -- but I don't recall there ever being any direction from that committee to move the Public Utilities Board to the Department of Infrastructure. If indeed it was, then Infrastructure would come under Economic Development and Environment, so I am just a bit confused by what the Minister seems to be saying. Is he suggesting, then, that this is something that has been initiated by standing committees? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Premier McLeod.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess to refresh the Member's memory I can provide him with a copy of the letter dated January 17, 2018, or I can table the letter in this House, or we can just give him a copy. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Premier McLeod. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks. I will be the first to admit that I do not read or see every single piece of correspondence, so if the Minister wants to give me a copy, that is fine. I will go back, though, to my earlier question then: is the Minister suggesting that the five questions about where we are going with net metering, that I cannot ask him, that I need to wait until the Minister of Infrastructure is up? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Premier McLeod.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I said, the Department of Executive only provides administrative services to the PUB, and the PUB has one staff, and that staff looks after the administrative arrangements for the Public Utilities Board. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Premier McLeod. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So who provides political direction to the PUB? Who issues letters of direction to the PUB? Do they come out of the Executive, or where do they come from? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Premier McLeod.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We have a Minister responsible for the Public Utilities Board, who is Minister Abernethy. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Premier McLeod. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So, if I was not confused before, I am even more

confused now. Who do I ask questions of in terms of policy direction and with regard to net metering? It is listed in the mandate as an Executive responsibility. The Minister has just told me that it is the Public Utilities Board, and now he said earlier that the administrative responsibility for the staff person is being moved to Infrastructure. Which Minister do I ask questions of in terms of policy direction with regard to where our government is going to support net metering? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Premier McLeod.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In our response to the chairperson of the Standing Committee on Government Operations, dated November 29, 2017, to this very question, we advised that: "Regular Members can identify the need for policy development and direction through any government-initiated consultation process, for example the review of the draft energy strategy, and standing committee can at any time propose the issuance of specific policy direction to the Public Utilities Board." Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Premier McLeod. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. While I appreciate that, we are talking about the budget here. I want to know: what is the position of our government in terms of supporting improved net metering? I know it is not answer period, but can the Minister tell me what our direction is as a government in supporting net metering, to deal with this particular mandate commitment? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Premier McLeod.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My recollection is that the government had meetings with the chair of the Public Utilities Board and asked them to review the net metering process which was developed by the Public Utilities Board. The Public Utilities Board, after some period of time, came up with a net metering policy, and that policy has been in effect. There have been concerns expressed about the fact that credits have to be utilized or they disappear or lapse at the end of the fiscal year.

If there are any questions or comments or any Member that has anything that they want to be directed to the Public Utilities Board, they can do it through the Minister responsible for the Public Utilities Board, or, once the service and support to the Minister will be done through the Department of Infrastructure, which has Energy as a lead, they would still have to work through the Minister responsible for the PUB to deal specifically with net metering, if they want to give direction to the Public Utilities Board. Thank you, Mr. Chair.