

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Inadequate Departmental Resources
Committee of the Whole—2018-2019 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Executive and Indigenous Affairs—February 27, 2018

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Since the decision was made to dispense with opening comments, I have a few opening comments on this particular activity item because this is sort of the corporate heart of the department and where policy planning legislation, communications, and so on, take place.

First off, I want to recognize that there are lots of great staff within the department, very hardworking, and many that I worked with before I became an MLA. I know that they continue to do a great job, but the problem is they don't get the resources that are necessary to do the job the way that it should be done.

This is only one of three departments that is getting cut in the 2018-2019 budget. The reductions are over \$3 million, and most are being reallocated internally for other initiatives, the sort of switching that I talked about earlier.

You can see this on page 73. Look at the compensation and benefits over time. From 2016-2017 to where we are now, that is a 14 per cent reduction in compensation and benefits within the department. This is a department that is bleeding, and they cannot get the job done.

Now, to prove that, I want to ask the Minister: there are 27 mandate commitments that this department has. How many of those have actually been completed? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the Member is absolutely correct. We have a lot of good people who work over at the department. I think, as far as the funding goes, they obviously feel they are able to do the job with the resources that they have. If they needed to seek more resources, then they would go to FMB. I think they will continue to do the work with the resources they have.

ENR has been very good at, as we get into the information items later, getting a lot of external funding as well. In fact, I think we have brought on one person to do the work going after external funding. We have been very successful. I think we have almost \$6.7 million in external funding from those that like to fund research projects; so we have been successful in that.

As far as the mandate items, we do not have that information at our fingertips, and I apologize for that in advance. I will work with our deputy and our officials to make sure we get that information and share it with the Members, but my apologies for that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I did the homework for the Minister over the

lunch hour. Out of the 27 commitments when you look at the mandate tracker on the executive website, only one has been completed; one out of 27 items. This is a department that cannot get the job done. They are behind in legislation, important wildlife planning, climate change initiatives. I am sorry to say this, but the department is way behind on everything, and it is because of the cuts that continue to be made to this department.

Last year, and again this year, there are cuts of \$371,000 to the corporate management function. You have lost four positions in communications, policy, and legislation. That is why things are not getting done.

Legislation is behind schedule. We are behind schedule in terms of getting caribou recovery strategies together. Our climate change work is lagging. It is because the department does not have the capacity to get the work done, and I think there are probably even more cuts coming.

I guess I would like to hear from the Minister how he is going to work to try to get this department back on track again. Can he go to his colleague, the Minister of Finance, to get more money to get the job done? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I could sit here all day and disagree with the Member, and he will disagree with everything I say, but I totally disagree with him, and I take offence to the fact that he says that this department cannot get the work done. That, to me, is not thinking very highly of the capacity of the people that we have there. They obviously feel that they are able to get the work done.

He has mentioned a couple of things, and I appreciate him doing my homework for me. I thank him for that, but the work on the Climate Change Strategic Framework, we are nearing completion on that work, and some things have changed that had us have to go back and look at the work we have done. We have to align it with a couple of the other strategies that are out.

I would be happy to share that information with the Member. I don't think I have briefed him on it yet, but there are some changes that have been made that have had us go back and look at the work that we are doing. It is unfortunate, because our folks put a lot of work into the Climate Change Strategic Framework based on the numbers that we were given. Some things have changed, and I need to have a conversation with the Member about that.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yes, I don't want to turn this into a big debate. I started off my remarks complimenting the hard-working staff in this department; there are just not enough of them to get the job done. That is my point here. I haven't really received much to make me any more confident that anything is going to change in 2018-2019 with this department. Look, I support the work that they are trying to do. They just don't have enough money to get it done.

I don't have any further questions for the Minister on this part, other than to try to

encourage him to get his department more resources to actually get the job done, and please stop the cuts to the department. Thanks, Mr. Chair...

(later in budget review)

... **MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yes, that's what I was most worried about. These reductions are not necessarily going to be confined to forest management. They might be made elsewhere within the department. Is that what I heard? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister McLeod.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: We will look at forest management, but the Member is correct. They will look throughout the department. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister McLeod. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yes, I'm quite concerned about further reductions in other parts of the department. I don't want to have to go back and re-live what happened with our discussion in corporate management and how I don't believe the department has the capacity to carry out what it's trying to do.

Look, does the Minister of Finance, as well? Is this something that he can take to the Financial Management Board and get them to just leave this extra \$1 million reduction for ENR so that they can get the work done that's required? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister McLeod.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I appreciate the Member not wanting to rehash the discussion we had under corporate management. As we start developing the next business plans, we'll come forward with some options we'll have prepared before committee. Committee will obviously make their concerns known, but we'll work on trying to come up with a solution that should work for all. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister McLeod. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the Minister's commitment, but so far, the solutions haven't worked with the fiscal strategy of Cabinet to reduce this department because it hasn't been able to accomplish everything that it wanted.