

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

UNION OF NORTHERN WORKERS NEGOTIATIONS

March 9, 2018

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Today I would like to set out my position on collective bargaining, the Union of Northern Workers negotiations, and MLA compensation. Collective bargaining began to be used in 1891 to describe negotiations and agreements that were used in Great Britain following the rise of organized labour. Collective bargaining is recognized as a fundamental human right in Article 23 of the 1948 UN Declaration on Human Rights.

Our workers thus have the right to organize and bargain collectively. I respect that right and truly wish for a freely negotiated agreement for the UNW. However, I also need to be clear that, as a Regular MLA, I have not been asked for my views and have not had any input into the mandate being put forward by Cabinet as part of the Union of Northern Workers negotiations. I have requested updates and generally been provided with information, but Cabinet has not sought my views, although I have expressed concerns. While I am pleased that a number of issues have been resolved, I must be clear that I do not support Cabinet's current wage offer, and the last adjustment of an increase in the offer of 0.1 per cent in the fourth year is a provocative move. Any offer that is significantly less than the Consumer Price Index increases is unfair and unlikely to get us any closer to an agreement.

Whenever the issue of the wage offer is discussed, the conversation inevitably turns to compensation for MLAs. Whenever politicians discuss their own compensation, it is a "no win" situation, which is one of the reasons why we appoint an independent commission to study the issue and receive a public report before decisions are made that then only apply to the next Assembly. While MLAs agreed very early in our mandate to a two-year temporary freeze on compensation, I cannot and do not support a continued freeze that would require an amendment to the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act. For me, the issue is not one of self-interest, but a continued freeze would be an endorsement of Cabinet's fiscal strategy of cutting programs and services to fund infrastructure. If there had been a serious effort to consider the revenue side of the fiscal equation, I might feel differently. Cabinet has undertaken no serious efforts to review revenues, especially from our newly acquired authority under devolution. At least two independent experts have recommended a review of revenues from mining, but Cabinet has chosen to ignore these calls to action.

Constituents of Frame Lake have asked my position on these issues and I am now on the public record. I recognize this statement may not be popular with some of my colleagues in this House, but I owe it to my constituents and all of our employees to make my position clear. Mahsi Mr. Speaker.