

## **Bill 6-- Cannabis Legalization and Regulation Implementation Act**

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### **GENERAL COMMENTS**

**May 30, 2018**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I do want to start with some general remarks. It was a real privilege to travel to seven communities outside Yellowknife as part of this joint effort. I went to Ulukhaktok; that's the first time that I've had a chance to go to that community. We were made welcome in all the communities, and I want to certainly thank everyone for their assistance with the travel and logistics, and especially those who provided their input during the process.

I'm not going to speak at length about what's in the report, but I do want to note that this does represent a fundamental change for many of our communities. This was a decision that was made by the federal government that we really didn't have a lot of input into. This was not about promoting legalization, or even legalization; that decision has already been made. This was about reviewing the bill that Cabinet had prepared.

I've been on the public record saying that we're not going to get it right. It's the first time we've tried this; we're not going to get it right. So that's why I think one of the most important provisions in the changes that the committee put forward was to require a mandatory review of the bill and its implementation into the next Assembly. That's going to be a very important review when it takes place.

We had to grapple with some very difficult issues. There's a divided opinion out there, and I do support the work of the committee, except for three important matters that I want to speak about briefly. I don't think it was a good idea to get rid of the advisory committee provision in the bill. I think that that committee could serve some legitimate purposes and I would have preferred that the committee itself would have been reconfigured, and membership would have been specified, and so on. So I didn't really support that, but I understand the rationale for the committee recommendation and the changes that were made to the bill.

Most importantly, though, I believe that the consumption age for cannabis should be 21 years of age. We heard from people in communities wanting the age to be 21 and/or higher. We heard from the medical community evidence that use of cannabis by youth can affect brain development. We had some interesting discussions and debates internally about this. I do note for the record that there are eight states in the US that have legalized cannabis; their consumption age is all set at 21, and the evidence that's been provided to me by medical professionals and their associations is that, in the US, certainly where there's a minimum age of 21 for purchase of tobacco, it has reduced adult smoking, smoking-related deaths, and has reduced youth smoking as well. That's with regard to tobacco, and I believe that the same trends would occur with cannabis use if we had a higher age limit. So I support a higher age limit. That's not what the committee recommended, but that's where I'm coming from, and I'll be bringing forward a motion that might help to deal with that issue in our proceedings tomorrow.

The other matter that I wish the committee had dealt with a little more clearly was the issue of plebiscites. It's my view that, where a cannabis store has been operating in a community and issues or concerns arise, that a community should still have the ability to influence the use of cannabis in their own community. I have prepared, and I'll bring it forward tomorrow, a motion to allow communities to enter into a plebiscite process for a restricted quantity system, even if there is an operating store with some other conditions that I'll go through tomorrow when we discuss that.

I do want to go on record as supporting the other recommendations made by the committee, and I'll be speaking to each of them as they come forward. I want to thank all of my colleagues for their very hard work in doing this. We did this under incredible pressure and timelines, and I think it's a good piece of work, and I look forward to the discussion and debate that's going to take place over the next couple of days. Thank you, Mr. Chair.