

STATEMENT at THIRD READING—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

**BILL 47:
APPROPRIATION ACT (OPERATIONS EXPENDITURES) 2019-2020**

March 11, 2019

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Yellowknife South, that Bill 47: Appropriation Act (Operations Expenditures) 2019-2020, be read for the third time; and, Mr. Speaker, I would request a recorded vote. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The member has requested a recorded vote. The motion is in order. To the motion? Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le president. Today is the final step in a very long and time-consuming process that began in September 2018, the three-week review of the departmental business plans. Committee of the Whole reviewed the 2019-2020 Main Estimates for 12 government entities from February 20th to March the 8th. We have received replies from Ministers for, I think, three of the departments reviewed so far, so prizes go to the Minister of Infrastructure, the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment, and the Minister responsible for the Housing Corporation. I look forward to receiving the additional information from the other responsible Ministers, as this should have been received in advance of the appropriation bill we are dealing with right now.

For the fourth year in a row, no public consultation was carried out with regard to the budget. Despite my previous recommendations, there were no consultations with Regular MLAs to help set priorities and develop the business plans. Cabinet dropped in very significant changes from the business plans to the main estimates to the order of more than \$20 million with no explanation. We had to ferret out, these changes and seek additional information. Further changes came to light on the floor of this House in Committee of the Whole. For example, Environment and Natural Resources restructured itself internally and reallocated its budget cuts, but provided no notice or revised budget documents for Members to base their departmental review upon. I will still waiting to see that information.

Thanks to our colleague, the Member for Yellowknife Centre, we now know that the budget for post-secondary renewal and the associate deputy minister leading that effort is buried somewhere in the Aurora College appropriation. While I strongly support our move toward a polytechnic university, there should certainly be a clear and transparent budget for that work.

What I learned during the main estimates review: there are definitely some good initiatives in this budget, including a \$3.3 million for Child and Family Services, a territorial midwifery program, and increased resources for autism. Some of the money for the new initiatives is being taken from some other programs, including a \$600,000 cut to homecare services funding.

The Minister of Justice has made a sincere commitment to carry out a comprehensive review of victim services. I look forward to the results and increased resources and

support for these important programs and staff. Additional funding for family violence shelters is also much appreciated.

911 emergency services are proceeding. That is a good thing. A lot more work is needed to achieve the July 1, 2019 implementation date.

I support legally binding land-use planning in the Wekweeti management area. A plan can assist with recovery of our caribou herds through habitat protection. However, I remain concerned that the federal government is not living up to its obligation to fund this effort. I urge Cabinet to work with the Tlicho government to bring the federal government to the table and invoke the dispute resolution process in the Tlicho agreement to settle this matter.

Cabinet has no intention of reviewing the Heritage Fund Act as laid out in the mandate. The fund continues to lose money against inflation and the plan now seems to be to contract out its management rather than provide a role for the public in managing the Heritage Fund.

A very large information system shared services unit of over 70 staff is being created with many transfers from other departments. The purpose appears to be to centralize control within the Department of Finance rather than improve client services. There is no monitoring evaluation framework, but the Minister is now committed to share that framework and a progress report with Regular MLAs.

Environment and Natural Resources is the only department that continues to take cuts in 2019-2020, to the tune of another \$1.67 million. During the term of this Assembly, funding for the department has been slashed by 10 percent. If there was ever any doubt that the environment is not a priority with Cabinet or the Minister, this is the evidence. Very significant delays have been experienced in getting mandate commitments completed, and other work, as well. This is not because of a lack of dedication by the hardworking staff, but a lack of resources in leadership. Responsibilities have increased with the climate change audit, Pan-Canadian Framework obligations, the caribou crisis, and new legislation developed without additional resources, but funds continue to shrink for the department.

The ENR Minister has not been able to protect this department or secure additional resources from his friend, the Minister of Finance. I am profoundly disappointed to see that there is no new funding to address the caribou crisis. Their legal requirements for recovery strategies for both Boreal and barren-ground caribou is these are now classified as species at risk. There is always money for roads, as we will see with the supplementary appropriations later this week, but nothing for caribou. That says it all, Mr. Speaker. A road into the Slave Geological Province is untenable and not responsible development when there is a caribou crisis with no new money to help with the recovery.

I was astounded to learn from the Minister of Infrastructure that, when it comes to federal funding, the Slave Geological Province Road is a higher priority than the replacement of the Frank Channel Bridge. Planning for a new road should not take priority over public safety. Without a safe Frank Channel Bridge, there is no Slave

Geological Province Road.

There has been some progress on increasing community government funding by \$1.8 million in 2019-2020, but we still need the plan to close the gap in the 2015 municipal funding review. Back then, it was a \$33 million shortfall, so this also needs to be updated based on our current needs.

There is no plan for having a single-window service centre in all of our communities. The Minister has resisted calls for such services in reaching those centres and Yellowknife, despite collaborative opportunities with Service Canada. Little to no progress on land rights and negotiations has taken place during the 18th Assembly, and I don't expect that any final agreements will be signed before the fall.

For a government that says it is committed to Indigenous rights and reconciliation, there is so little to show. Little to no progress in contaminated sites management and prevention of public liabilities has occurred, and that was also a mandate commitment. Most of the work should be done by the Department of Lands. Some sort of tracking system has yet to be completed, and a manual on contaminated sites management has been in preparation for what seems like years. There have been no new policy developed, regulations, or completed legislative changes to ensure that we reduce the risk of taking on new public liabilities.

Over the last four budgets, I have offered some thoughts on how to improve the budget process, including early and meaningful consultation with Regular MLAs and the public. I have also recommended a more balanced approach that includes more revenues and a stronger focus on diversifying our economy.

Transformative change can come through the emerging knowledge economy, on opportunities such as the conservation economy with Thaidene Nene. We need solid plans and investments for adequate housing and universal childcare so our residents can engage in the economy. We need to get our housing out of core need while creating local jobs. We need to provide stronger support for the arts, tourism, agriculture, and the fishing industry. We must reduce greenhouse gas emissions, lower the cost of living, and develop a real post-secondary education system. These sectors also create more jobs than non-renewable resources developed per dollar of investment. That is the kind of leadership I had hoped for in this budget in the main estimates.

I was very pleased to work with my Regular MLA colleagues to get some very modest improvements in this budget. While I appreciate and can support many of the activities, programs and services, and some of the new initiatives in this budget, the lack of priority for the environment, housing, and economic diversification continues to move the NWT in the wrong direction. I will not be supporting this budget or the appropriation bill. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

RECORDED VOTE

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. The Member is requesting a recorded vote. All those in favour, please stand.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Mercer): The Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes, the Member for Hay River South, the Member for Thebacha, the Member for Mackenzie Delta, the Member for Sahtu, the Member for Yellowknife North, the Member for Kam Lake, the Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh, the Member for Nahendeh, the Member for Yellowknife Centre, the Member for Deh Cho, the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, the Member for Range Lake, the Member for Great Slave, the Member for Yellowknife South.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. All those opposed, please stand.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Mercer): The Member for Hay River North, the Member for Frame Lake.

MR. SPEAKER: All those abstaining, please stand. The results of the recorded vote: 15 in favour, two opposed, zero abstentions. The motion is carried.

---Carried

Masi. Bill 47 has had its third reading