

MEMBER'S STATEMENT — KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE
ECONOMIC RECOVERY

May 28, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. On April 17, 2020, the federal government announced \$1.72 billion in financial assistance for the remediation of orphan and inactive oil and gas wells in Western Canada. This includes:

- Up to \$1 billion to the Government of Alberta;
- Up to \$400 million to the Government of Saskatchewan;
- Up to \$120 million to the Government of British Columbia; and \$200 million as fully repayable loans to the Alberta Orphan Wells Association to support its work to clean up sites across Alberta.

There are currently about 4,700 orphan wells in Alberta, 600 in Saskatchewan, 350 in B.C.; inactive oil and gas wells: 91,000 in Alberta, 36,000 in Saskatchewan, 12,000 in B.C. I think there are some lessons there about how not to do oil and gas development, as well.

As part of this funding, the Government of Alberta has committed to implement strengthened regulation to significantly reduce the future prospect of new orphan wells. This will create a sustainably funded system that ensures taxpayers are not left bearing the costs of the environmental responsibilities of companies. The funding program will have oversight from a federal-provincial committee, and the federal government will ensure municipal and Indigenous engagement.

What does all this mean for us here in the Northwest Territories, Mr. Speaker? While all of this is good news for the energy sector, we need similar federal investment here in the Northwest Territories to drive economic recovery and remediation of long-standing contaminated sites.

The Federal Contaminated Sites Inventory shows 1,647 sites in the Northwest Territories, with an estimated assessment and remediation cost of \$12.375 billion. The GNWT 2018-2019 public accounts show a total of 285 sites under our jurisdiction with a cost of remediation estimated at \$70.6 million. What I am calling for is federal assistance to accelerate work on all of these sites and for our Premier to make sure that this a priority in her discussions with federal, provincial, and territorial counterparts on economic recovery. It may even be possible to work with Yukon and Nunavut to push for a dedicated, accelerated Northern contaminated sites initiative.

Later today, I will have questions for the Premier on whether she is willing to take this on to secure federal investment for the remediation of contaminated sites as a part of our drive towards economic recovery. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.