

MEMBER'S STATEMENT — KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE
Support for Entrepreneurs and Economic Development Policy (SEED)
Funding Delays
June 1, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. The Support for Entrepreneurs and Economic Development, or SEED, program is promoted as "one part of the Government of the Northwest Territories' ongoing investment in a diverse, sustainable economy." This is obviously increasingly important as we move towards economic recovery from the pandemic.

The Assembly passed an interim budget that included the first quarter of operational funds for each department on March 16. Some departments also received all of their grants and contributions funding, including Industry, Tourism and Investment. This was done in anticipation of the economic downturn and to ensure that the GNWT could quickly respond with financial assistance, including the SEED program.

A constituent complained to me about a response received from ITI on March 24 regarding his SEED application. "ITI is working with other departments to develop a coordinated response to the COVID situation. Until that response is finalized, we have been instructed that we will not be accepting any new applications to SEED for the 2020-2021 fiscal year."

My constituent did not receive any further communication from ITI on the availability of SEED funding for 2020-2021 by April 22, so I contacted the Minister for an explanation. Six days later, the Minister replied that guidelines would be completed within a week to ensure coordination of SEED with federal programs and a focus on COVID-related recovery. I replied immediately saying there was nothing on the ITI website to inform SEED applicants of this delay or on the amounts of funding for each of the eight SEED streams. After eight more days, the Minister responded to say that there was no firm budget for each SEED stream, and that the applications would be handled at the regional level. The guidelines were supposed to be forthcoming within a couple of days.

The much anticipated guidelines were finally released on May 11, eight weeks after MLAs approved the ITI budget. It's not clear why it took so long, too long, to open up the application process and develop a one-page, seven-principle guideline for funding approval. I'll have questions later today on why the SEED funding was delayed as this is clearly not how we wish to be approaching economic assistance and recovery. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.