

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

**QUESTION 268-19(2): Support for Entrepreneurs and Economic Development
Policy (SEED) Funding Delay**

June 1, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My question is for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment. Earlier today, I raised the issue of the eight-week delay in accepting SEED funding applications for 2020-2021 from the time that we approved the ITI budget until the release of a new guideline to assist with economic recovery. Can the Minister explain why there was an eight-week delay in opening SEED program funding for 2020-2021? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment.

HON. KATRINA NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. ITI SEED program was announced on May 11, 2020, five and a half weeks into the new fiscal year. The SEED program began taking applications for the 2020-2021 year with an increased budget of \$4 million. A new guideline was announced at this time, and all the SEED programs are available for funding. However, priority was given to supporting business development opportunities that are forward looking, supporting local employment, and have a plan that reflects our new economic realities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I don't want to get into a debate with the Minister, but it certainly was eight weeks since this House actually approved a full contribution funding for the department. There seems to be little clarity around the amount of funding for each of the eight SEED streams, and whether that money is divided regionally or some other way? Some of my constituents have said that that uncertainty is not very helpful. Can the Minister tell us whether there is any allocation of SEED funding by stream, region, or any other means, and how this will be communicated to the public?

HON. KATRINA NOKLEBY: As mentioned, SEED has a funding, or sorry, a pot of \$4 million this year. It is my understanding there are not allocations to the different programs, but rather, we evaluate each application on a case by case merit. They are regionally evaluated. However, it is my understanding, there aren't certain amounts allocated to the regions. However, I will confirm that with my department.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. Maybe that information might be posted to the ITI website so that members of the public would actually know, as well. The one-page, seven-principles guideline for 2020-2021 SEED funding is for a range between \$30,000 and \$75,000. The new guideline is not reflected in the application form or the ministerial policy that was approved in 2019. It seems to me to be a little bit behind the times. Can the Minister explain

why the SEED application form and the ministerial policy has not been updated to reflect the new guideline?

HON. KATRINA NOKLEBY: It has been a very busy time over the last while. I did want to confirm that I have received confirmation from my department that there are regional funding allocations for the SEED program, and we can provide that for you. I do believe there is information available on the website. I can't really tell you exactly why that particular piece of information hasn't been updated, other than the fact that updating a ministerial directive, which is an overarching theme for my department, was not my priority at the time. My priority was to get the funding out to people. I will commit to the Member that we will update that immediately.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary, Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. I pointed this out weeks ago to her, so the delays in developing the new guideline and opening the SEED program application are difficult to understand. I think we have to be able to do a lot better. I listened to my colleague from Kam Lake ask questions last Thursday on the Minister's responses on the SEED applications to date. Can the Minister tell us whether there are any plans to seek additional funds for SEED or modify it further in light of the pandemic and need for economic recovery? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. KATRINA NOKLEBY: Yes, my department constantly advocates and lobbies with the federal government for more funding for our programming, including SEED. We have numerous ongoing conversations with CanNor and with federal ministers in my FPT tables. Every time, I raise the issue of needing more business supports for Northwest Territories businesses, that we do fall through the cracks, and that the majority of our businesses are small businesses, which are already having economic uncertainty prior to COVID. Yes, we always look for more funding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.