

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

SENIORS

November 3, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madame la Presidente. In June this year, the Member for Yellowknife Centre, who is now the Minister responsible for Seniors, sponsored a motion calling for creation of a seniors' and elders' strategy. As pointed out in those debates, action on this growing sector of the population is now guided by a 2014 strategic framework that focuses on health-related aspects of aging. The motion called for expanding that vision with an integrated strategy that takes into account issues beyond healthcare. The successful motion called for a strategy that "provides a whole-of-government approach to enhance and coordinate programs and services to elders." Each new demographic report shows the dramatic growth in our seniors population, with 60-and-overs growing from 2,787 in 2003 to 5,981 in 2018 and a projected 9,383 by 2035. We need a strategy more than ever and now.

The NWT Seniors' Society has lobbied for a renewed strategy and supported the June motion. They say improvements are needed in housing, homecare, transportation, income, and market rent supports. Aging in place is especially emphasized as a cost-effective and self-reliant alternative to institutional care, although long-term care also needs attention. We need more than health-specific programs to ensure a decent quality of life for our seniors. Boiled down, the main ask of the motion was for the government to provide resources to bring a broad stakeholder group together for the creation of a new vision and action plan.

The former Minister responsible for Seniors said a new strategy "may not be achievable... in light of... COVID" but that issues such as housing, health supports, community infrastructure, and personal safety are taken up in other mandate goals. I see from the new Minister's mandate letter that the development of a seniors' strategy is not one of her assignments. I will have questions for the new Minister responsible for Seniors on what action she will take to develop a seniors' strategy. Mahsi, Madam Speaker.