

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
NTHSSA Stabilization Plan
Committee of the Whole—2021-2022 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Health and Social Services—February 25, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: I did want to move on to the stabilization plan for the NTHSSA. I raised this with the Minister, and my mind's kind of fuzzy; it might have been yesterday, and the Minister said that the plan was really not a public document. It was really an operational sort of document. The offer had been made to us as Regular MLAs to get a briefing on it, which I am happy to accept. It's out there in the public that there is a \$120 million deficit, and my view is that this is chronic underfunding of the system over many, many years. This is not something that just kind of cropped up in the last two or three years. I don't understand the secrecy around this plan and why we wouldn't be able to share parts or all of it with the public, to be more transparent and open about how we're going to try to address this as a government. What is the Minister prepared to do to try to make this a more transparent process? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Rocky Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you. The Member is correct. I did say that it's an operational plan, I did say that I would brief the committee, and I did say that it would not be made public as a plan itself. I think that, once the plan has been made operational and we have a better understanding of what the cost drivers are and what kinds of changes need to be made, then you will be hearing about those specific changes. For example, we just had a conversation about what is a core service and what isn't a core service. I think that that's the kind of conversation that we're going to want to have with the residents of the NWT, so that there is an opportunity for input and buy-in to the work that we're undertaking. However, that is what we're offering. It is not a secret process. It is the way that the authority is looking at stabilizing its finances, and that's not a public process, any more than us having a look at how you manage your family finances is a public process.

We need to be able to do that work and then come with the findings and ensure that people understand what those are, what kinds of compromises need to be made. Make no mistake, there will need to be compromises. We cannot continue to increase the deficit at the level that we've been increasing it. We are going to have to make some tough choices here, and there will be unhappy people. I absolutely guarantee it. I'm not happy about that, but in order for us to make the coat out of the cloth we have, we're going to have to cut some things. What is that going to look like? Honestly, I don't know. I want to hear from you about what you think it is going to be, but adding on and adding on and adding on is just simply not in the works. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Rocky Simpson): Thank you. Member.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yes, I appreciate what the Minister said, but if you want the public to have confidence in what we're doing, we need to open the books a little more, I think. This is not about me straightening out my finances; this is about public money, and where difficult decisions have to be made, the public has a right to

weigh in about how those decisions are made. I think we've got to find a way to allow for some public input and greater transparency in the whole effort moving forward.