

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

GOVERNMENT RENEWAL INITIATIVE

February 4, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. On October 30th, the Minister of Finance announced something called the Government Renewal Initiative, and she discussed it again today in the context of the budget. The Minister said, "We are going to use the current climate of recovery and renewal as an opportunity to reimagine how we obtain, manage, and control those financial resources."

The Minister painted a rather grim picture of our finances due to the significant capital spending, which has driven up our short-term debt. The Government Renewal Initiative is supposed to lead to what she calls "value-driven budgeting" through a review of all GNWT programs and services, department by department, with a framework early this year.

It is not clear when Regular MLAs will be engaged or involved in the Government Renewal Initiative and whether that will be before decisions are made. It will also be important to secure buy-in from our workforce and the general public through clear communications. While I believe in program evaluation, I want to make sure that both short- and long-term effects of changes are carefully weighed and considered, as well as differential impacts of any changes on communities, regions, and disadvantaged populations.

I am also concerned that the amount of time and effort that is likely required may not be enough or fast enough to head off the looming fiscal crisis where our debt limits are exceeded. We need to make tough political decisions now on what the priorities are and where the NWT should be. You can't set out trying to realign your spending unless you know what your spending priorities are going to be. I've outlined my priorities, Mr. Speaker. I push for housing, education, childcare, energy self-sufficiency, and a more diversified economy, rather than the massive spending on large infrastructure projects of dubious value that have driven us into increasing debt.

I will have questions later today for the Minister of Finance on the Government Renewal Initiative about whether it can deliver the desired results and how it will be implemented and communicated. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.