

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 611-19(2): LEGISLATIVE LETHARGY

March 1, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Earlier today, I spoke of the legislative lethargy of our Cabinet. We are about a third of the way through our term, and no bills of any substance have been proposed by Cabinet. Changes have been promised to the Education Act, to implement UNDRIP, to bring our resource management into this century, and more. Can the Premier explain whether there is any substantive legislation planned for the current sitting? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Honourable Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to defer that question to the Government House Leader, who is responsible for legislative initiative, Minister Simpson. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Premier. Government House Leader.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the beginning of every sitting, I provide the Regular Members of this House with a list of the legislation that is likely to be introduced. This sitting, there was no legislation planned to be introduced. That said, we are hoping to get a couple of bills introduced at some point in this sitting. However, those have to go through Cabinet, so I cannot say whether or not they will happen. Whether or not they are "substantive" according to the Member's definition, I am not sure, but we hope to have some work for them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Government House Leader for that answer. Maybe we will get a couple of bills. However, I spoke about how this is supposed to be the Legislative Assembly, not a debating club. Can the Government House Leader tell us when any significant legislation is going to be introduced to put our committees to work?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: I hope the committees are busy working right now. There is a lot of work to do outside of legislation, despite being the Legislative Assembly by name. Again, any bill that is introduced is subject to Cabinet approval, so I cannot say that a bill will be introduced by this time. However, any member of the public can go and look at the four-year business plans put out by the Government of the Northwest Territories. Every single department lists their legislative initiatives with their proposed dates when they want to introduce the bills. Now, has there been some slippage? Yes, there has, but we were dealing with something for the past year that took a lot of our energy. Some of the departments with the heaviest legislative loads for this term were some of the hardest hit and most affected and were busy with other things. Despite that, we have still had twice as much legislation as the previous Assembly by this point.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank my colleague, the Government House Leader, but who could forget the legislative landslide in the last eight months of the last Assembly? I personally spent most of the summer away from home, in committee travel, meetings, and a final sitting of the House in August where one clause-by-clause review of a bill

stretched on for four-and-a-half hours, until past midnight. Who could forget that, Mr. Speaker? What is Cabinet doing to prevent a repeat performance?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: I, for one, will not forget that, and I remember all of the Member's amendments that made it stretch out until past midnight. However, we did learn from the last Assembly. We have asked departments to give us more realistic timelines for legislation and to be brutally honest and look at themselves in the mirror and say, "Can we get this done at this point?" Right off the bat, we had a more realistic list. We are also using technology to ensure that we can track our legislation better. We are one of the first divisions in the government to start using the APEX Database, which is something that is going to be rolling out. It is taking some time because we are the first to use it and there are some technical challenges. That is going to help, as well, and we will all have access to the legislation. I also want to point out that, yes, in the last Assembly, there was a lot of legislation at the very end and that some of the departments that put forward that legislation now have regulations to work on for this entire term and are not putting forward legislation. There is another component to it, as well. It's not all acts; there are also regulations.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Government House Leader. Final supplementary. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Government House Leader for giving me credit on the clause-by-clause review of that faulty legislation in the last Assembly. Of course, we are looking forward to getting some regulations, as well. While I can understand that COVID may have delayed some of our legislative work, I am more than happy to ensure that departments and the government as a whole have the resources to start legislation flowing. Can the Government House Leader confirm whether there are the human resources and capacity necessary to begin to turn the legislative taps on? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: It's always a challenge to develop legislation. In addition to the people to just sit down and write the legislation, there are some bills that need a lot of consultation before they are ever bills. People have to fly into communities to talk to communities. There is a lot of work and a lot of hours that go into developing these. That being said, we do have the capacity. It's a matter of prioritizing, and so I would just ask that the Member keep down the number of additional requests he is making of the government so that we can prioritize that legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.