

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

ORAL QUESTION 746-19(2): CLIMATE EMERGENCY

June 2, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My question's for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources who should actually be the Minister of Environment and Climate Change - still waiting for that change.

In my statement earlier today, I noted how the Yukon government has established a youth panel on climate change and that they met virtually for the first in January of this year. Can the Minister tell us whether we will ever get a similar body for interested youth in the Northwest Territories and if not, why? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister responsible for Environment and Natural Resources.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NWT Climate Change Council was established in March 2021 and they have been having meetings. Part of the development of this council is panels, and we do have a panel for youth and we are trying to getting them engaged. This summer, ENR has some opportunities for youth to be involved. But other youth have had the opportunity to reach out to me, and I've had the opportunity to meet with them. In my former life, youth were important. I always say our foundation is our elders and our future is our youth. So I'm more than willing to meet with them. We do have the panel and I can tell you that the council during their meetings are really interested in developing that youth panel. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President, I wanted to recognize the work that the Member has done with youth -- or the Minister, I should say. There are a number of court cases in Canada against the federal and provincial governments due to their inability or unwillingness to deal with climate emergency without fobbing off responsibility in to the future which is what our government's approach is really all about. Can the Minister indicate whether our government is watching these court proceedings and perhaps watching over its shoulder for NWT youth? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the GNWT is aware of these cases. The Department of ENR follows the shifts in climate change best practice and legal actions as part of their comprehensive approach to addressing climate change. Youth have a particularly important role and stake in climate change. As we all say, that's our future. At the people are going to be looking after this -- looking after us and our planet.

ENR continues to take active advantage of and provide opportunity for youth involvement, including the youth advisor group and youth gathering. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. Of course one of the principles of these court cases is intergenerational equity and that is actually one of the considerations that is supposed to be used in (QUOTE) “a draft statement of environmental value that explains how environmental considerations, including the right to a healthy environment, will be integrated into decisions that might have a significant impact on the environment.”

Mr. Speaker, that quote is from the Environmental Rights Act that was passed a year and a half ago in the last Assembly. We still don't have that statement of environmental values. Can the Minister tell us when Cabinet will finally obey its own law and bring forward the statement of environmental values for public consultation and explain how the climate emergency was considered? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for the question. The statement of environmental values required under the Environmental Rights Act will outline how the environment will be considered when government decisions are made that may have a significant impact on the environment.

Specifically to the Member's question, ENR has prepared a draft statement of environmental values that will be ready for a 90-day public comments period by the end of this summer. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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. Sometimes I feel like, and I probably even look like a dinosaur, Mr. Speaker. But the real dinosaur here is our climate change approach, which I think is headed for extinction as it's not going to be successful in doing our part to meet emission targets that are required to save this planet. So I'm not prepared to wait until another two years for Cabinet to only find out that it's not on track. It's back-end loaded with projects that will never happen.

So can the Minister tell us when Cabinet is going to review and revise the faulty climate change approach from the last Cabinet? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this required a lot of details and I thank the Member for giving us advance notice on it so it's going to be a little bit longer but I need to share this important information.

The 2030 Climate Change Strategic Framework and the 2019-2023 action plan were developed collaboratively with Indigenous governments and organizations and other partners in NWT after extensive engagement. As reported in the annual report released early this year, the GNWT and our partners are making a lot of progress in implementing the action identified in the 2019-2023 action plan.

I am pleased to report that all 104 action items in part 1 of the action plan have been initiated and are in process. The NWT Climate Change Council is established and its panels get off the ground, they will further prioritize future actions.

Progress is being made on some parts to action areas; for example, funding was secured to develop a climate change adaptation plan for wildlife in the NWT.

Additionally, the last fiscal year, 15 positions were funded across five GNWT departments to support actions on climate change. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.