

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Flood Relief Assistance
Committee of the Whole—2021-2022 Supplementary Operations Expenditures
Budget Review
June 3, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Can someone explain to me the \$5 million line here for flood relief; how was that figure picked? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the five million is really an initial figure right now to support the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs and, more specifically, the disaster assistance committees that have been set up to go in and to provide, firstly, the emergency services and emergency supports that have already been offered. So in terms of the costs of conducting the evacuations, the cost of providing shelter and food for evacuees, you know, cots, fans, camping equipment, supplies, again, food, and various other supplies in a real emergency moment. So I understand the costs in that regard are already upward of -- well, pushing \$3 million. So this helps provide some liquidity to the department as they've already incurred those costs.

There's obviously a recognition that there's going to be some relief that needs to take place immediately and in the coming months. And so putting it to five million gives, again, that cushion for that initial needs and then some room to undertake the costs that will be incurred in the next while. It's fully anticipated, and there's already a coding, a financial coding being made available so that all of the costs associated with flood relief and recovery, including the emergency and ongoing will be recovered -- I'm sorry, not recovered but will be tracked so that we can provide a sense of what the total value is over time. I think there's probably a very likely chance that we'll be back in front of the House to seek some additional appropriation in this regard in the fall. But this, again, allows this response to move forward for the moment. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Is any of this earmarked in any way for some kind of a program fund that's going to get money into people's pockets immediately on a non-reimbursement basis? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, the process that would be followed through the disaster assistance committee is that individuals have the opportunity -- members of the community have opportunity to make their application, make it known, list out what items it is that they may have lost and, you know, what damage they may have incurred. And while there's no necessarily -- you don't necessarily have to be bringing in a receipt to do that. You -- essentially, you're writing out a list of what you believe your losses or damages to be. The caveat or the kind of note that I'd make with that, though, is that if you're doing that in advance and

you're submitting this list without receipts, without having, you know, necessarily incurred those costs at the front end, you do take the risk that they may not in the end say okay, that every single item you've claim for can in fact be covered. But, you know, again, if people are -- if people are being conscientious, as I'm sure they will be in looking at their losses and keeping in mind, you know, that -- then, you know, that they are -- yeah, that there is that caveat there and this isn't something -- it would certainly provide the opportunity that when they need to go in and get some real essential items, you know, you can do your own sense of it but the risk would be, to me, if they're essential items, you're much more likely to see them ultimately covered once the entire process is underway. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Member.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I think that was a two-minute 'no'. Look, I've got only six minutes left on the clock. We've got about 15 minutes left in the chamber. This is probably the most important thing we're going talk about today, and we're getting a lot of complaints. I'm getting complaints, as a Yellowknife MLA, that there's no way to get the money into people's pockets right now.

I've looked at the application form for the disaster assistance policy and it's, I think, six, eight pages. It's English. If your first language is English -- or you don't read or write English, you may be out of luck. I'm not sure that this is going to be very helpful for elders. And it's really for damaged property. It does not cover people's immediate needs for food, accommodation, you know, whatever -- and I understand that some of those costs may be covered already through municipal governments doing -- and MACA doing things, but we're getting contacted about people needing immediate assistance right now - money in their pockets. And I guess I've heard that not one cent of this money is allocated for that purpose. So what are we going to do to fix this? That's what I think I need to hear. Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Madam Chair, that's not accurate. The \$5 million is for flood relief. It's for flood relief in the communities, for small businesses, for individuals, for residents, tenants, homeowners. It is just -- it's how, indeed, now it does get rolled out is, I think, really where the question is, but that is exactly its purpose, is to support all of those individuals who are in the flood-affected communities. And the application process is one that allows it to operate through the disaster assistance policy that has been in place for, you know, years. It is the one -- the same that has been employed on previous occasions. And so it's a system that exists, a system that works. It allow us to, you know, get -- be organized and structured in how the funds are being distributed and equitable and how the funds are being distributed and to make sure that there is a process in place for that.

So, yeah, there is an application form. It's a form where you essentially start out by writing down your contact information and then you describe your damaged property and the items it is that you -- you know, that you feel that you need to have replaced.

So there are now two navigators that are in the flood-affected communities in the South Slave. Those individuals are certainly well placed to assist any individual that needs the assistance. But I know that the Department of MACA has previously put out a Q and A saying that, you know, you don't need to wait for a MACA employee, you can go to any senior GNWT employee. They will be able to help filling out these forms and move this process forward so that people can begin to apply for funds. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member.

MR. O'REILLY: Madam Chair, okay. I've looked at this form. This is for reimbursement. This is not money in people's pockets, some kind of an advance right now. What are we going to do to fix this problem? I'm sorry, I do not want the Minister running out the clock for another two minutes on me, please. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Madam Chair, I'm gonna be in a difficult situation to describe a program in two minutes and 50 seconds. So as I've committed to in the opening session and the opening statements, at this point there's a recognition that there are individuals who are not currently receiving supports through the evacuation program, who may not be on income assistance, who's already handed out additional 1,000 to families and 500 to individuals, or who aren't receiving the hampers that are being handed out for food. So if in fact that does continue to be the case, I know we are all very concerned about there being an availability of funds immediately, that this five million, as I said in my opening statement, the Departments of Finance and Municipal and Community Affairs are going to work on a process to ensure that these \$5 million, and that this process, is putting those dollars into people's hands immediately. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I'm going to switch topics slightly. I do not consider this to resolved and this -- okay, two issues: Who's going to help people fill out this form? The two navigators are floating around in the communities. They're there for a couple of days, then they're going on down the valley. Those navigators are not going to be there helping people fill out these forms. Who's going to help them -- people, elders who may not speak any English fill out these forms? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. The navigators are the first point of contact but they're not the last point of contact. Madam Chair, there are government staff and government employees in all of these communities. There are senior members from various departments who have been on the front lines from day one, and they will continue to be there. And if direction simply needs to be given to them to say, you know, you will acting outside of your specific department, I fully expect that, in fact, they've already been doing that as part of their role within the disaster assistance policy and its enactment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Member.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I just don't consider this to be resolved. I would like to know whether the Minister is prepared to ensure that there's annual -- or sorry, not annual, monthly reporting of the expenditures of this \$5 million similar to what's happening for the COVID Secretariat. Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd be happy to make that commitment.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Member.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I appreciate that work's been done to -- through income assistance to get some funding in to people's pockets. Is that a onetime payment, or is that going to continue on a monthly basis as long as people need it? Thanks, Madam Chair.