

## MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

### COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

#### CONSIDERATION OF MINISTER'S STATEMENT EMERGING STRONGER: COVID 19 SOCIAL ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN, AND TABLED DOCUMENT 413 19(2) EMERGING STRONGER: PLANNING THE NWT SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY

June 4, 2021

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I guess I'd like to start by thanking Cabinet for the work that they did on Emerging Stronger and I will acknowledge that they did consult regular MLAs, and I still think that it needs a lot more work.

The first point that I really want to make is that nowhere in the document or in the Premier's statement on the document, and I haven't done a real detailed look on the Executive website, but it's not clear how anybody's is to actually submit comments on it, or whether -- if there's going to be some place where comments might get compiled, whether the document is actually going to get revised in some way. So there's a whole communications consultation component that's totally missing. And I think the Premier said that they are interested in getting comments but there's no actual way to do that. And I've actually had one Yellowknife resident already point this out and make a complaint to me about this, so I'm sure there's others that feel the same way.

Some general comments as well, Mr. Chair, about the approach. It really is an incremental approach that really tries to tie economic renewal/recovery to the mandate, and I just think that we should be looking at something much more bold, fundamental changes. Here's an opportunity to help rebuild an economy to make it more sustainable and just. And what I see here, basically, Mr. Chair, is more of the same.

I would like to see broadband-made strategic infrastructure priority over the other big projects that this government continues to advocate and push for. I think the shortcomings with our broadband network were really shown during the pandemic, and that should become the flagship infrastructure project that this government wishes to get resolved.

I will acknowledge that we did make some progress, actually, with our vulnerable populations in Yellowknife and Hay River, Fort Simpson, even in Inuvik. But I'm worried about sustaining those efforts, and I -- you know, even here in Yellowknife, I understand that the day shelters closed, that some other accommodation may not be available for vulnerable populations into the long-term future, so I want to see that support continue.

There's really nothing in the document about fiscal sustainability. There's the government renewal initiative discussed. I -- I'm not opposed to that. I think that there might be some useful changes that come out of it, but there's nothing on the revenue side. As I've said many times in this House, I would have expected to see something in this document about tax fairness and a new fiscal relationship with Ottawa. That's not in the document whatsoever.

We do need to build a more resilient self-reliant economy, acknowledge the climate emergency. There's discussion in here about a greater more sustainable economy, but no specifics. And there is some effort to support tourism. There's several portions of the document that do discuss tourism, but I think we have some tremendous opportunities with regard to remediation economy. The document, though, was very tentative in this regard, and we've yet to actually secure any federal investment in this area and that's because Cabinet continues to pitch the remediation economy piece or work on accelerating remediation work on contaminated sites here. The Cabinet continues to pitch this as some kind of industry bailout, and if I was the federal government I wouldn't invest in it either.

What you need to do is start to talk about direct partnerships with Indigenous governments, like the recent Great Bear Lake Remediation Governance Agreement, and empower Indigenous governments to go off and do some of this direct partnership work themselves with the federal government. That's not mentioned in here either, Mr. Chair.

One of the most troubling parts that I find in this document is there's -- the only mention of the arts and culture in here is a throwaway that the strategy is forthcoming. I wish that we could somehow capture some of the enthusiasm from our ITI minister earlier in this day and put that into this document. It's nowhere to be found, Mr. Chair. That's the kind of enthusiasm that I'd expected to see in here in terms of building a more sustainable economy and diversifying our economy.

Mr. Chair, when I looked at the economic diversification section of the document, very -- most of the items that are listed there are about promoting mining. Mining's already a central part of our economy. I just fail to see how promoting more mining is going to diversify our economy. So I think that section really needs to be revised. If you want to have a section that talks about how you support mining, put it in a section talking about mining, but mining is not necessarily about diversifying our economy. Forestry could and should be part of that, with the price of lumber increasing exponentially. We do have some lumber mills that have been set up here and work periodically. Here's an opportunity to become more self-sufficient when it comes to wood that's used in building homes and renovations, energy conservation, retrofits on homes. Let's see something more in here about forestry potential. And that would help to diversify our economy.

There is, at the end, an appendix that starts to talk about timelines, a few specific actions, but, again, there's no funding identified in this document, Mr. Chair, and I think that's a real problem.

The other I think shortcoming in this document is that there's very little in here that really addresses the mental health crisis that's arisen during the pandemic, and I don't really sense any systemic approach to dealing with that in this document. And nothing on food security, Mr. Chair. Thank goodness we passed this motion earlier today, but virtually no mention whatsoever of food security in the document.

There is some reporting to be done in the document -- or through the document but it's not clear exactly what's going to be reported. Some key indicators, but nothing really

about how the analysis is going to be undertaken on those key indicators, and more importantly, how that leads into a response or action by our government. So that needs to be improved as well.

I think that's my comments, Mr. Chair. But, once again, I would encourage our Cabinet colleagues to find a way to truly encourage public input to this document and set up a website, an email address, whatever, so that people can actually submit comments and that you can respond to them in a systemic and transparent fashion. Thanks, Mr. Chair.