

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

PRINCE OF WALES NORTHERN HERITAGE CENTRE

June 4, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. The Prince of Whales Northern Heritage Centre, now, that's the old English name for the museum or heritage centre, has been the NWT's flagship cultural showcase and artifact repository since opening in 1979. Its mandate has been established through various strategies and reviews, most recently formalized in the culture inherent strategic framework 2015 to 2025. That framework clearly states that the centre's central role in, quote, "safeguarding the heritage", end of quote, of the Northwest Territories through object and records preservation, maintenance of an archive, the mounting of exhibits in collaboration with other heritage organizations and centres.

The museum's physical ability to carry out those tasks has been questioned in reviews of the state of the facility, the most recent in 2018. That assessment identified a large array of physical deficiencies, including the -- impeding the museum's ability to fulfill its mandate functions. Key deficiencies include the lack of an elevator or adequate storage space, poor heating and air conditioning hampering artifact preservation, lack of space for teaching, for hosting travelling exhibits, and poor energy efficiency. Last summer, there was a flooding of the basement that luckily did not result in major damage. Some of us have had tours of the facility and can attest firsthand to the shortcomings and immediate need for expansion and remediation.

Most recently, the department has embarked upon a, quote, "analysis of charging admission to the museum, an analysis of current revenue streams, and the identification of potential sources of revenue", end of quote. With no significant action on the physical defects and the ten-year strategic framework approaching its end, the narrow focus on revenue seems a wasted effort. We need to roll all this work up, stop studying the problems, and act. We can't even do something as basic as changing the name of this facility to reflect its northern reality.

A recently completed tourism 2025 road map to recovery clearly states that when COVID-19 travel restrictions are lifted, we need to concentrate on product development activities. To me, that's exactly what the museum also represents for visitors. We need to start making those investments in this facility now. I'll have questions for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment on the future of the museum, how we can give it a modern name, and protect our heritage for future generations while ensuring tourists have something more to do and learn. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.