

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

ORAL QUESTION 778-19(2): COP 26 AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

November 22, 2021

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My question's for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, and I'll squeeze in he's also in charge of the climate crisis.

I was thankful we had a delegation at COP26 but we need to move beyond blaming the feds. Can the Minister tell us whether there are any plans to centralize responsibility for the climate crisis including energy projects in the Power Corp and have one minister responsible for all of this. 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. Mr. Speaker, as the Member is well aware, the Power Corp is with Minister Archie so whereas the energy climate -- energy plan is under Minister Archie's portfolio. However, in saying that, we don't have any current plans in place; however, we've been having conversations on how we better deal with the climate change and energy issues. So we've been able to work with that there.

So also we have to be aware is that the Department of ENR and Infrastructure has a couple of -- a number of departments working -- or groups, collaboration between a couple of groups. So the director's climate change working group, the ADM climate change -- climate change working group, energy and climate change deputy ministers, and a committee of cabinet. So we do have a number of people working together to address this. But presently, we do not have any plans to amalgamate things. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. I'd be happy to be part of those conversations when he wants but it's no surprise to this House that I don't support -- I've never supported the climate change approach from the last Cabinet. We need to develop a real and focused climate crisis response; ditch the old approach from the last Cabinet and Assembly.

Can the Minister tell us whether he considers the current state of the climate a crisis; and, if so, can he commit right now to adopt the widely accepted carbon neutral target of net zero by 2050, or even sooner if he wants. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I agree that we are in a climate change crisis. We've been in it over 15 years. So I'm not saying anything new. When I was at the opportunity to attend Scotland, that was the climate change, we talked about it. Everybody was talking about when it was going to happen. This is the

reality. The sad part about it I found even more frustrating is I had to educate Canadians. Canadians weren't understanding our challenges that we face day-to-day.

So in saying that, though, as for the net zero 50 -- in 2050, unless we get more money from the federal government, we're in trouble. We're not going to be able to meet the needs where we want to get there. And so, you know, we have the Department of Infrastructure working on the energy action plan. There's a new one coming up, and I believe it's supposed to be starting to look at 2022. So we're starting the process that will be involving committee, involving Indigenous governments moving forward. So presently, right now, unless the federal government wants to give us some more money, we're in trouble, folks, and I'm not lying. I'm not trying to hide anything. That's the reality of it.

And I had the opportunity to talk to Minister Guilbeault about that. Minister Archie had recently had an opportunity to talk to Minister Wilkinson about it. So, again, even though the federal government is spread out in two different departments or three different departments, similar to what we are, we are trying to work with them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that and his passion. Earlier I spoke about the need to face the capitalistic crisis at the NWT Power Corp and its entities head on. So just as the Minister spoke about, we need a real plan in place to -- and we don't have one.

So can the Minister commit to working with his colleagues and the public to develop a real and just transition plan for energy in the NWT? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes, we're -- me and my colleagues, Minister of Finance and Minister of Infrastructure, we're talking all the time about climate change and how we move forward.

Mr. Speaker, I can say that the GNWT has a plan under the Climate Change Strategic Framework and the 2030 Energy Strategy. The energy strategy guides the development of affordable, secure, and sustainable energy for transportation, heat, and electricity, as well as supporting energy efficiency, conservation, and promotion of renewable and alternative energy solutions for the Northwest Territories. The energy strategy takes an adaptive approach and remains flexible to take advantage of new technology and opportunity as they arise, including accessing federal funding.

And as I said, 2022 is when we're starting to go through this. So there is this opportunity to look at the plan that we are in place, enhancing it, and improving it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I can hardly wait to work with the Minister in 2022 on all of this. But I spoke of, you know, we got to stop pretending that big petroleum development is ever going to come back to the Northwest Territories. So can the Minister tell us what he is doing to convince his Cabinet colleagues that we cannot

and should not promote large scale fossil fuel development and exports in the interest of this planet? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, first and foremost is the working with the Arctic communities out there. If you look in the High Arctic, basically they're on fuel. They're on diesel, and they're having an impact there. How do we get off them, how do -- we able to deal with that?

So, again, it is working with the municipal governments and other -- I would call them regions and -- when we were at COP, we had the opportunity to talk about in the southern hemisphere where they have regions working together. And one of the things that I talked about after coming out of that meeting, we need a regional approach to it. When I say a regional approach to it, I'm talking about Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Yukon, Alaska, and Greenland. We've had the opportunity to talk to Greenland, and some of their ideas and some of the things they're able to achieve. So we are willing to work.

And as for right now, we have to understand if you look up in the Beau-DeL, they're talking about the potential of turning -- of changing it to gas right now. They have this opportunity, they're working on it, so we cannot dictate to the communities or the regions on how the best way to do it but we can work with them, and I think that's the most important aspect of it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Kam Lake.