

GREAT SLAVE MEMBERS STATEMENT – FEBRUARY 5, 2009

2009/2010 Budget

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

Thank you to the Minister of Finance for his budget address today.

We are certainly live under tough financial times where everybody, politicians, individuals, households, businesses, are required to make tough financial decisions. However, it's not just about making tough financial decisions, it's about make informed and responsible financial decisions. It will require thinking outside of the box for them to take individuals out of their comfort zones.

As a Government, I feel that the way we do business can often limit our ability to think outside of the box. Specifically, the way we create silos that compartmentalize our decision making based on established departmental structures limits our ability to stand back and take a holistic view of our finances and how we spend money.

Prior to the last budget session, each department was given marching orders to review their budgets and find reductions. Some Departments met their targets and others still haven't. The question is: Is this the right way to do things? To me it doesn't take a holistic approach to reviewing our financial situation and fails to address those areas which are truly important to the residents of the NWT.

For example: ITI met their reductions during the last budget session and will be moving forward with renovations and upgrades in a number of northern campgrounds. Clearly something that needs to be done.

H&SS didn't meet their targets. This year, while other jurisdictions increase their health budgets anywhere from 7 – 10 percent, our Health budget is increasing by just over 1%. On the face of it, it sounds good, but when you consider that forced growth is around 3% on a Territorial level and just to keeping pace with delivery of Health Services budgets and other health systems have traditionally increased by around 6 or 7 percent, it means that H&SS will have to cut services to be on budget in 2009-2010.

Here's the problem: This government fails to stand back and look at the big picture. What is more important to people of the NWT? I suggest that Healthcare definitely affects and is more important than a few campground upgrades. Yet, because we don't look at the whole picture the priorities of one department can overtake the priorities of another department even when the priorities of that second department are far more important and have a far greater impact on the people of the Northwest Territories.

When it comes to financial planning, as a Legislature, we can't afford to look at each department as their own little empire. We need to see the big picture. Yes, planning needs to be done on a Departmental level and we should demand efficient running of each, but we must also look at the final budget on a global scale and how cuts in one department rank with cuts or new initiatives in another department.

Our strategic direction, mission and mandate should assist us in prioritizing cuts and new investments. Where one of our main goals is “Healthy and Educated People” it’s hard to understand why reductions, affecting health care are in the best interest of the people of the Northwest Territories. Yes, we need to be efficient and make sure our system is running efficiently and we spend every dollar to its maximum benefit, but what is it in the best interest of the people of the Northwest Territories? I don’t believe cutting health is for the sake of the parks.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.