

STAFF MORALE & BUDGET REDUCTIONS

During our last session I went on record concerning morale in the public service. After receiving the main estimates yesterday it is clear that 231 positions have been targeted for reduction. Fortunately only 147 of these will result in potential job loss because 84 are currently vacant.

Staff of the G.N.W.T. are our most valuable resource. They're the people who provide the essential services to all the residents in the Northwest Territories. Without a happy and motivated public service, we fail in the delivery of the essential services we are expected to deliver as a government.

These job cuts do nothing but radically reduce already poor morale. Further, this job cutting exercise is seen as only the first round of cuts. Whether or not a second round of cuts is coming it does cause uncertainty within the public service which further affects moral and the quality of services provided by our dedicated, yet nervous and apprehensive staff.

As I indicated previously, I believe focusing on job cuts is exactly the wrong way to pursue a course correction with respect to the government's spending patterns.

The public and the Members on this side of the house have offered Cabinet many suggestions on ways to improve our financial situation without cutting staff – things like reviewing and improving our energy use and consumption within the government itself, restructuring

boards and agencies, and increasing co-operation between departments in order to reduce duplicate spending.

During the last session I and my colleagues on this side of the house strongly encouraged the Premier and Cabinet to make every reasonable effort to reduce our overall spending through streamlining as well as creative and innovative thinking and planning. After looking at the Main Estimates last night it appears to me that our encouragement to find reductions other than through job cuts has largely been ignored. Don't get me wrong, upon review it's clear that one or two of the Departments were more creative and did find alternate saving without having to cut jobs. However, the vast majority appear to have gone directly to job cuts.

I am a realist. I know that this type of restructuring exercise will result in a few (**and I stress a few**) job cuts. However, as indicated previously, these job cuts should be a last resort; they shouldn't be the government's first solution to our financial difficulties. I'm disappointed that Cabinet has pursued this course of action as I believe they're setting us up to re-live the mistakes of the 1996 government cuts.

To avoid re-living these same mistakes I encourage Cabinet to listen to the regular members, your colleagues, and reconsider many of the job cuts you are proposing. We must support our most valuable resource: our dedicated and committed staff.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.