

MEMBER'S STATEMENT – GREAT SLAVE – MAY 26, 2008

BUDGET DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

A lot of Members have already gone on record discussing the proposed budget and the process that has been undertaken today. Given that today we may be voting on the first and second readings of the budgets, I thought it would be timely for me to talk about the process as well.

It has been suggested by Cabinet that the 11 Members on this side of the House have been adequately briefed and involved throughout the entire budget process, including the cuts themselves. When it comes to reductions, the 11 Members prepared a list of potential reductions, not focused on job cuts, and provided them to Cabinet for consideration. We were told that there were some good ideas, but they would need research before they could be implemented. That makes sense. However, if research into our ideas is required, I would suggest that research into the changes put forward by Cabinet would also need to be reviewed and researched as well. Instead, they put their ideas forward as part of the budget.

To me, they don't appear to be the most logical and appropriate cuts given Cabinet's commitment that job cuts would only be as a last resort. Some departments made no attempt to reduce other than by cutting jobs themselves, which is contrary to the original message. With respect to the job cuts, we've also been ignored. During the last session, we asked that job cuts be a last resort. We were also given the understanding that we, as Regular MLAs, would be notified before potentially affected staff.

On February 28, 2008, we received a letter from the Minister responsible for Human Resources indicating that jobs are being cut. Unfortunately, staff were being notified at exactly the same time. That hardly gave us an opportunity to discuss the potential cuts with Cabinet and offer alternative solutions. Further, the package we did receive did not include a list of potentially affected positions; rather, it just said staff were being notified. We didn't receive a list of potentially affected employees until three weeks later, long after staff had been told.

The worst part about this whole situation is that the Minister of Human Resources went on record in the March 3, 2008, issue of News/North indicating that MLAs had been told about the notification in a briefing and a letter. I don't personally recall the briefing.

As a Regular Member I don't personally feel that I've been adequately briefed and/or involved in setting the priorities for the proposed reinvestment either.

When it comes to the reinvestment, Regular Members have continually asked to participate in the setting of priorities. We have continually been denied that opportunity and been told that we won't be invited to participate in the strategic reinvestment committee. The entire process has been lacking, and the net result is, in my opinion, not in the best interests of the people of the Northwest Territories.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.