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Budget Development Process

Mr. Ramsay: I too would like to speak today about the budget process that the government has followed that leads us up to where we're at today. Just several months ago, on October 1, Members of the 16th Legislative Assembly were elected. Shortly thereafter we got together to develop a strategic plan and vision on behalf of the residents of the Northwest Territories.

I want to let my constituents and the public know that this process has not been inclusive of Regular Members, and it absolutely runs contrary to the spirit and intent of consensus government. If I could, I would like to point out a few examples of how this government has, in my view, effectively taken away the input of 11 Regular Members, and thus the voice of two-thirds of our population, to develop a budget. That is their budget: not mine, not my constituents', but cabinet's and the bureaucracy that crafted it.

I can point to a number of instances where Regular Members have been on the outside of this process. It began with cabinet's decision to cut \$135 million and re-invest millions in strategic initiatives. Part of the plan called for 135 positions to be potentially impacted. The Premier and the government assured us in February, when we were last here, that they would let us know which positions and areas were being targeted for reductions before any decisions were made.

We all know that the notification letters went out, and Members were left fielding calls from constituents who had received these letters. Regular Members were left out to dry by cabinet. We had no prior knowledge of which positions would be affected or the justification for such moves. It took us over three weeks to finally get a summary of affected positions from the government.

In a consensus government like this, this should never have happened. It's inexcusable. We routinely ask, as Regular Members, to be included but are continually brushed aside. Where were Regular Members when the Building Canada Fund funding list was developed? Where were Regular Members when cabinet was divvying up eco-trust dollars? Where were Regular Members when cabinet decided to re-invest millions of dollars?

The answer is we're not party to any of these discussions. I am feeling very uneasy about a budget process that has not been inclusive of Regular Members, one where I don't believe my input as a Member — or the input of my constituents — has been taken to heart by the government.

Mr. Speaker, it is going to be a very interesting few weeks that we have here. I do look forward to the debate that is going to take place. Mahsi.