

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

9-1-1 EMERGENCY TELEPHONE SERVICES

June 7, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Recently in my riding a long-time business was destroyed by fire that might have been controlled by the presence of a modern emergency reporting system. I'm talking about 9-1-1, as this Assembly has been discussing 9-1-1 for over 10 years.

In the case of the recent fire, media reports indicated that a person new to Yellowknife called 9-1-1 to report a fire only to find out there was no such thing. In desperation, the person actually drove to the fire hall to report the fire, but by then it was too late.

As I said, 9-1-1 has been studied up and down through the terms of at least three Assemblies. The most comprehensive report published in 2015 indicates that a Yellowknife based 9-1-1 service could be set up for about \$600,000 and run annually at a net cost, after service levies of about \$250,000. This isn't nickels, but territory-wide rapid-response coverage for about a quarter million dollars after the start-up fee seems good value for money.

And while we talk as much as we like about how people should learn the emergency numbers and keep them handy, the very existence of 9-1-1 call services worldwide shows that just doesn't work. So what is it going to take? The NWT Association of Communities has had a standing resolution on its book since 2009 urging "the GNWT to adopt a phased approach for implementation, beginning in the regions with pre-existing telephone switching infrastructure suitable for 9-1-1 services."

Talks on the introduction of the service have taken place between MACA and the City of Yellowknife as recently as this year. Both parties are still supportive of the service introduction, subject of course to the availability of funds. Creation of 9-1-1 capacity would involve the city expanding its current dispatch area at the fire hall and hiring additional staff. Both parties agree a phased roll-out of the service is preferable, starting in Yellowknife and then adding communities. A roll-out to the six tax-based communities, plus Behchoko, would represent three-quarters of the territorial population. What is clear is that we need the introduction of some service, but before another tragedy. I'll have questions for the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.