

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 182-18(2): 9-1-1 EMERGENCY TELEPHONE SERVICES

June 7, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, who holds responsibilities for community emergency measures and response. My first question to the Minister is what are the phone numbers for the police and fire department and ambulance service in Yellowknife. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs

HON. ROBERT C. MCLEOD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Any prefix, you dial 1-1-1-1 gets you the ambulance. Any prefix you dial 2-2-2-2 gets you the fire department. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral question. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Masi, Mr. Speaker. Almost full marks to the Minister. He just had them in the wrong order. But--sorry, I didn't really mean that as a trick question, but I guess when we tried some of these numbers ourselves, any permutation, 873-6669 goes with 1-1-1-2-2-2, and you get the emergency numbers in Yellowknife. But if you phone 9-1-1, you get a recording that says there is no 9-1-1 service.

Who actually has control over that recorded message, and is it not possible to change it to provide clear information on just what numbers should be called? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ROBERT C. MCLEOD: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I will commit to the Member that I will follow up on that and see if it could be redirected to the (inaudible). The Member is correct. 9-1-1 is an issue that's been in the assembly, I think, for the last ten years. We are starting to hear more and more about it, and we had done some work on it, but I will go back to my commitment to the Member that we will look and see what we can do to try and forward them to the proper numbers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral question. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: I thank the Minister for his response. I think it's an easy, quick thing that we might be able to do to at least start us down that path, so I appreciate his commitment there. I am wondering, though, about phased introduction of 9-1-1 service. One study proposal is to expand the dispatch centre already in place for the city of Yellowknife, and in fact in the Yukon, Whitehorse introduced 9-1-1, and it was rolled out to the communities. Will the Minister consider that sort of option here for the Northwest Territories?

HON. ROBERT C. MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, once the report was done and after exploring some options, it was determined that a phased in implementation would probably work the best. There is some cost involved with that, and I believe there is some legislation that needs to be developed. Again, we have heard from the NWT Association of Communities and people across the territory, especially in the larger communities, the importance of this. The Member said in his statement before, I think we have studied this to death, and now is the time to implement some of the recommendations of the study, and I will commit to doing my part as I did to the Member for Hay River North to try and see if we can do this.

Again, part of the pressures that we're feeling on the financial side; if we can help alleviate some of those pressures so we are able to invest in some of the new initiatives. We heard some Members talking about the need for a new school. Everybody has a financial issue that they want resolved. If we can alleviate some of the pressures of our current fiscal situation, then that will give us the opportunity to implement a lot of the new initiatives. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral question. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker, and once again, thanks to the Minister for that. Just stay tuned. I have a reply to the budget address a little later. There are some good ideas in there, I hope. But I have one other idea that I'd like to pitch with the Minister. There was a recent court case where Bell lost a court case about non-existing 9-1-1 services, and that was recently a recent settlement coming out of that. Congratulations to the Andersons for bringing that case forward in their public service.

But now that it's out of the courts, maybe it is time that we look at approaching Bell and the Andersons to become part of the solution here as well. So will the Minister commit to consulting Bell and the Andersons to seek renewed opportunities for introduction of 9-1-1 service in the Northwest Territories. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ROBERT C. MCLEOD: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we need to look at all of our options. If that is one of the options then maybe they can give us a million dollars to implement 9-1-1. It doesn't hurt to ask. But again, this is an issue that I would like to see resolved. It started 10 years ago, and my answer at the time or when I first got to the MACA ministry was that because of technology and the lack of cell phones across the Northwest Territories, technology has improved. That's all been taken care of.

There is no reason, I think, other than financial why we shouldn't look at implementing 9-1-1 on a phased-in approach as recommended by the report and as supported by pretty well everybody including NWT Association and Communities. As I made the commitment to the Member from Hay River North, I will make the commitment to the Member for Frame Lake that I will do what I can to see if we can move this initiative forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.