

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 299-18(2): PARTICIPANT FUNDING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS IN THE NWT

June 29, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I spoke about the divergence in views between the federal and our territorial governments regarding participant funding for environmental assessment in the Northwest Territories as found in the 2015 Environmental Audit. This issue's been around for over 20 years and it's time to solve this problem. Can the Minister of Lands tell this House whether the issue of participant funding was raised during the devolution negotiations, who raised it, and what the response was? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Lands.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my understanding was that funding was not addressed in any detail during the devolution negotiations as legislative responsibility for the MVRMA or its boards remain with the Government of Canada. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I'm a bit disappointed to hear that GNWT didn't use the devolution negotiations as an opportunity, we're always on about capturing opportunities, to try to resolve this situation when we had some leverage. I spoke earlier this week about the recently announced federal review of environmental assessment processes, the Federal Government wants to rebuild public confidence in resource decisions, I think that's a good thing. Although the North was left out of this process, we should perhaps capture that opportunity to push the federal government to treat us the same as other Canadians. Will the Minister commit to writing the Federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change and ask that the issue of participant funding be considered in the context of a review of environmental assessment processes?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: GNWT Ministers are going to be meeting with the Federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change next month, and I can assure the Member that this issue will be raised at that time.

MR. O'REILLY: I appreciate the commitment from the Minister and I look forward to hearing back from him about his discussions with the Federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

I mentioned how residents of Northwest Territories along with residents of Yukon and Nunavut do not have access to participant funding for federal environmental assessment except in very limited circumstances, and these are usually at the discretion of Ottawa. Truly, we're treated as second-class citizens in this country. Can the Minister of Lands tell this House whether he would be willing to work with our northern neighbours to attempt to resolve this injustice of no participant funding for Northerners?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: We're not interested in being second-class citizens in our own land anymore, and I will commit to having conversations with my counterpart in our sister territories and see how we can work as a unit to try and address this issue.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the commitment by the Minister to work with our neighbours in Yukon and Nunavut. I've been on record talking about the need to build

confidence in our resource management decisions and that people have to have the ability to participate in these processes. Larger projects often involve technical expertise in their evidence-based processes to help level the playing field and ensure we retain the benefits of resource development, participant funding is essential. I understand the Minister is prepared to work with our northern neighbours, but would he be prepared to look at signing perhaps even a joint letter with our neighbours in Yukon and Nunavut to push this issue with or federal government? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: We as well would like our public to have confidence in our ability to deal with any type of development in the land that we look after. And I will have conversations with my counterparts. And we have a meeting coming up with the Federal Minister. We can raise the issue at the time and see what the feedback is from the Federal Government, and we'll use that as a go-forward basis. If we have to partner-up with our neighbours, then we will do that. And again, as I said, we do want the public to have confidence in our ability to deal with any issues concerning the land.