

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 306-18(2): CABINET COMMUNICATIONS WITH REGULAR MEMBERS

October 13, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I talked about the growing problem of poor communications between Cabinet and Regular MLAs. My questions are for the Minister of the Executive. Does the Minister agree that there were several significant breaches of the process convention on communications between the Executive Council ministers, standing committees and Regular Members this past summer, as outlined in my Member's statement?

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Honourable Premier.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wouldn't go so far as to characterize it as serious breaches. I would just talk about the four instances that the Member raised on the Robertson headframe with Newmont. The proponent wrote to all the Yellowknife MLAs indicating that he had talked to our government. I do have e-mails from the four Yellowknife MLAs outlining their positions with regards to the Robertson headframe. So for him to say that it's a complete surprise that we were talking about the Robertson headframe, I guess he considers that as very serious. Perhaps we should have communicated directly with the Chair rather than asking the proponent to also bring it to their attention.

On the carbon tax, it's a question of interpretation. If I was totally against it, why would we agree in Montreal that there are different ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and we are open to that? I raised the concerns that we have, not only ourselves, but the three territories, that a carbon tax, we already live in a very high-cost environment, and to add increased costs, you know, we were the only jurisdiction in Canada whose population was declining on an annual basis, and to add to the cost-of-living would only exacerbate that.

Also that our economy is still developing and also we're concerned about food security, recognizing that we were going to develop our own greenhouse gas strategy which we're rolling out now. On the Mackenzie, well I don't live in a perfect world, we have people that make mistakes. I wasn't aware that somebody was going to talk about Mackenzie Highway. My understanding is the federal government is still looking at the Mackenzie Highway.

On the Yellowknife Airport, we exchanged correspondence. We had requested to do a briefing on a number of occasions, had been refused, and the media briefing was only provided at the request of the media and we only presented information that was already shared with committee. We will continue to endeavour to work to make sure that we communicate with all of the communities, as appropriate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I appreciate the response from the Minister, but we obviously disagree on communications. I'd like to know, can the Minister tell us whether the current executive has accepted and abides by the process convention on communications between the executive council, Minister of Standing Committees and Regular Members that he signed on September 8, 2014?

HON. BOB MCLEOD: That protocol is in the process of being renegotiated. It'll be rolled out very shortly, and we stand by it. Communications is a standing item of all of our cabinet meetings of every decision paper and we will continue to endeavour to fulfill those commitments that we've committed.

MR. O'REILLY: Can the Minister tell this House what the consequences of are for breaching the process convention on communications between executive counsel, Minister of Standing Committees and Regular Members?

HON. BOB MCLEOD: The consequences are obviously it deteriorates the relationship we have with the Standing Committees, and so we endeavour to not have that happen. We Follow-up and work very closely with all of the ministers and all of the departments. Certainly, deputy ministers are held to account for work that is being done by their departments, but certainly it's something that we are endeavoured to improve upon on every occasion.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Well, we could probably go on and debate this for quite some time, but clearly when I continue to find out things that are going on through the media there's a problem. But I'd like to know from the Minister, what is he prepared to do to prevent poor communications from happening again and again? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: I don't see it happening again and again, but it's something, as I say, it's a constant process, we discuss it all the time. Every issue, every decision paper, every information item dealing, responding to the media, we endeavour to make sure that committees, especially the chairs of the appropriate committee and the MLAs are made aware of it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.