

BILL 7:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE REVOLVING FUNDS ACT

MR. VANTHUYNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, your committee would like to report on its consideration of Bill 7, an Act to Amend the Revolving Funds Act. Bill 7, sponsored by the Minister of Transportation, sets out the legislative framework for a revolving fund to be established at the Yellowknife Airport. Revenues generated at the airport could best be used to fund its operations, maintenance and capital costs. Bill 7 received second reading in the Legislative Assembly on June 27, 2016 and was referred to the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment for review.

Today, I am advising this House of committee's wish to extend our review of Bill 7 and intention to report back to the House at the earliest possible opportunity during February 2017.

Mr. Speaker, we find ourselves in a situation where information crucial to understanding the changes enabled by the legislation was not available with sufficient time for the committee to complete its review with the original 120-day review period. This process typically includes internal committee review, stakeholder engagement, public hearings, and carefully considered responses before reporting to the House with recommendations on the bill.

Given the level of public interest and the nature of changes proposed for the airport, it is necessary to understand the operation and administration of the revolving fund and for the committee to conduct due diligence in its review of Bill 7. We believe that stakeholders and the travelling public deserve the opportunity to be heard as changes to the administration of the airport go forward.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Rule 75(1)(c) of the Rules of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories, I move, and seconded by the Honourable Member for Sahtu, that the review period for Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Revolving Funds Act, be extended for a further 120 days. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Member, the seconder is not in the House at this point.

MR. VANTHUYNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, and seconded by the honourable Member for Frame Lake, Mr. O'Reilly, that the review period for Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Revolving Funds Act, be extended for a further 120 days. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Motion's on the floor. Motion's in order. To the Motion. Member for Yellowknife North. To the Motion?

MR. VANTHUYNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have opening comments, I may later have closing comments. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: To the Motion. Minister of Transportation.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Establishing a revolving fund for the Yellowknife Airport is a critical step in the NWT's plans for improving how the airport is funded and managed. The Yellowknife Airport could be making money for itself if we ran it more like a business. That money could be put towards improvements in all kinds of areas. We're talking like things like parking, shorter security lines, more businesses in the terminal and in the holding area. With the way we're running the airport right now, Mr. Speaker, it's costing the government \$4 million a year, and we still can't make these improvements.

Establishing a Yellowknife Airport Revolving fund and running it more like a business would let the airport keep the revenue it collects and spend it directly on the operations and on capital

improvements. Having the Yellowknife Airport fund itself through a revolving fund would also free up \$4 million which the Government of Northwest Territories is currently spending that could be spent on other priorities in this Assembly. We think the proposal is a win-win, Mr. Speaker and have been engaged with the public and the business community to hear what they have to think. DOT has met with the NWT Chamber of Commerce, the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce, NWT and Nunavut Chamber of Mines, Northern Air Transportation Association, NWT Tourism, City of Yellowknife, Aboriginal governments, and northern businesses that have expressed an interest in the initiative.

We hope we would get this legislation passed this session, Mr. Speaker, so we could start collecting this revenue and get on with some of the improvements we want to take and make at this airport as soon as possible. This motion throws off our schedule a little bit. It means we will miss out on collecting some of the money. But we get that committee wants to make more time to consult with the public on the proposed changes. We respect committee's wish to take the time to talk to the public and further review the bill. Cabinet will be abstaining from this motion, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. To the motion. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Masi, Mr. Speaker. I am disappointed that our colleagues across the floor have indicated they are going to abstain on this motion. There was some reference in the Minister's reply or statement about missing revenues and so on. This is an important motion in terms of making sure that our standing committees have the ability to do the work that is required of them for them to carry out their due diligence roles.

I could go on about years of inertia across the way in terms of not making these changes a lot earlier. As early as possible on this side of the House, when we were made aware of this, even before it was a legislative proposal, during the business plan reviews, Regular Members raised some concerns and issues around this, communicated them to the Minister as early as May 12th, even before there was a legislative proposal that had come forward. When the legislative proposal finally did come forward at the end of the last session, as early as June 6th, the standing committee had communicated with the Minister our desire to have further information on the business plan for the Yellowknife Airport moving forward. Mr. Speaker, that information took four months to get to the standing committee.

If we are going to talk about lost revenues, then we need to talk about the delays from our Cabinet colleagues in trying to move this forward. I am disappointed to hear that the Minister raised these issues around collecting revenues. I am not going to accept any blame for that, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the other side needs to move along getting information to this side of the House much more speedily. I am disappointed to hear the Minister make these remarks. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. To the motion. Member Yellowknife North.

MR. VANTHUYNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Economic Development and the Environment has been clear since it first considered the legislative proposal that it would not be possible to conduct meaningful review of the Act to Amend the Revolving Funds Act in absence of a business plan outlining the government's model, fee structure, and proposed administrative framework of the Yellowknife Airport that would be enabled by the legislation. The Department of Transportation was unable to provide this integral piece of information until nearly two thirds of committee's review period had lapsed. The delay directly resulted in committee not having sufficient time to meaningfully review the proposal,

contact stakeholders, schedule public hearings, and report to the House within the original review period. Mr. Speaker, this is precisely the role of committee in review of any legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the standing committee does not wish to delay or obstruct the work of the department. In fact, we commend them for the efforts that they have put forward to date. In fact, the committee has gone as far as to encourage the department to continue its work and to consider advancing the proposed changes to fees within the timeline within the draft business plan. The committee is seeking an extension today to allow it to conduct a meaningful public review, to conduct its due diligence, and to do its job. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. Motion carried.

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