

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 485-18(2): ATTENDANCE AT VANCOUVER MINING CONFERENCE

February 1, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. My questions are for the Premier, the leader of the recent Cabinet staff trip to the Mineral Roundup meeting in Vancouver. Many people have asked me how this kind of expenditure is possible when we heard that there are desperate needs out there, and 65 more positions are about to be cut in the budget. Could the Premier tell us what value there could be, and what indispensable role was played by our Health Minister, our Housing Minister, our Justice Minister, and even our Finance Minister attending such a conference? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Honourable Premier.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to report that our attendance at Mineral Roundup in Vancouver was money very well spent. Our sister territory, Yukon government, was also there in full force with their whole Cabinet and their opposition parties as well promoting mining. The whole government has a stake in the success of mining. A strong mining sector also means revenues for the Government of the Northwest Territories' social programs and other services. Aboriginal government representatives that were there had some very specific questions in the areas of housing, education, and health, and how mining could help deal with those issues.

A lot of work gets done at Roundup. It is a coming together of more than just mining executives. It provides a maximized opportunity to connect with a wide variety of industry and government representatives, so, Mr. Speaker, this money is very well spent, and there will be a substantial return on investment in future years. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks to the Premier for that response, but I'm just wondering, on process alone, surely Cabinet must have realized that there would be public backlash when word of the Vancouver trip got out.

In the interest of consensus government, will the Premier commit to produce a report at the beginning of each fiscal year, listing the events, participants, and projected costs of all anticipated Cabinet conference travel, as is done by, for example, Yellowknife City Council, just to try to avoid these kind of surprises in the future?

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Roundup has always been a priority for our government, and especially since devolution. Our government has been attending Roundup for probably the past 20 years, so I don't think it's a surprise that we attended this year. The cost for our participation in the Roundup events and the trade show have consistently averaged around \$80,000 a year. This year was no exception.

This year's event saw increased travel costs related to the attendance of Cabinet and our support of Aboriginal government participation. This extra investment must be considered in the context of returns to our territory, the urgency that we are facing to

renew exploration investment in the Northwest Territories, and the costs of meeting or connecting with many of these parties individually.

I might add that we give notice whenever we're travelling someplace. We have a protocol which requires us to do so. We report on all of our travels on a quarterly basis. It's all posted on the website.

MR. O'REILLY: I don't think I really got an answer there from the Premier. I had asked if we could get sort of a listing of anticipated Cabinet travel costs at the beginning of each year. I woke up on Monday morning and found out about all of Cabinet going.

But in any event, what I'd like to do is to try to see if the Premier could -- you know, there are a lot of other conferences out there. I looked at trying to find out if there's actually anything at the national level in terms of renewable energy, and there doesn't seem to be anything that focuses on the north and our opportunities and challenges and so on, but perhaps we could take the lead on that kind of a conference and keep the money at home, attract conference trade, foster a centre of excellence for renewable energy in the Northwest Territories, renewable energy in the circumpolar world.

So, will the Premier commit to work with his Cabinet colleagues to take, say, \$50,000 from the mining conference travel budgets and put it forward to organize a circumpolar renewable energy conference in the interests of diversifying our economy, reducing the costs of living, and so on?

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to report that we are already doing that. Inuvik holds a renewable energy technology conference on an annual basis, and it's scheduled for the middle of June. Members are welcome to attend. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Mr. Speaker. I'm very glad to hear that. It used to be a petroleum conference. With the end of petroleum in the Beaufort, maybe it's been refocused. That's great. I'm glad to hear that.

We all know that mining is important to our economy, but how can we expect to diversify our economy when most of our attention, if not all of it, is focused on this sector?

The mining industry has extensive influence over what our government is doing and prepared to do in terms of legislation and policy, so what assurance can the Premier give to this House and the public that he will act in the public interest in terms of policy legislation moving forward and not just in the interests of the mining industry? Merci, Mr. Speaker.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: As I said in my sessional statement, this government is all about economic diversification. If there are other sectors that create approximately 2,500 jobs in the Northwest Territories and they have conferences, I'll make sure that all of our Cabinet attends those conferences.

Right now, the perception is that the Northwest Territories is not open for business. We need to change that and improve the Northwest Territories' investment climate, and

that's why it was important for Cabinet to attend Roundup in Vancouver. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.