

**MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE**

**NORTHERN FRONTIER VISITORS' CENTRE**

February 3, 2017

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, monsieur le President. In my Frame Lake riding lies the heart of tourism service in our capital. The Northern Frontier Visitors' Centre is a physical presence and is an online and on-call resource for tourism. The Centre is the heartbeat of tourism for Yellowknife.

Just look at the numbers. In 2016, 55,233 people visited the Centre. This is a visitation increase of more than 400 per cent from 12,230 visits recorded in 2005. The Centre mailed out information packages to 7,402 customers last year. Website visits totalled 155,000 hits. The airport gift shop run by the Northern Frontier Visitors' Association was visited by 35,521 customers, and information requests increased from 3,000 in 2012 to more than 8,600 last year. Canadian visitors account for about a third of the Centre's business.

The results, thanks in large to the Centre's information promotion activities, for prospective visits and walk-in guests tourism is a major economic success story here in Yellowknife. Consider aurora tourism alone: since 2008/2009, aurora visitation in the Northwest Territories centred almost exclusively in Yellowknife has jumped 440 per cent, from 5,500 visitations to 24,300 last year. Spending has soared right along, rising from \$10.2 million in 2011-12 to \$40 million last year; a 390 per cent increase. As anyone watching the blue parkas knows, visiting the Northern Frontier Visitors Centre is a must for most of these tourists.

As anyone who has visited the Centre knows the building is falling apart. The rear portion of the building has been closed eliminating display space for visitors. Major renovations or a total replacement is inevitable.

A structural engineering study is under way now, co-funded by CanNor and the GNWT. The study will examine key questions. Is there a long-term permanent fix to the structural instability of the building besides a levelling or other system that requires continual monitoring and adjustment? Can the damaged rear portion of the building be removed and an addition be reconstructed?

Does the entire Visitors Centre need to be replaced -- is it unsalvageable and is a new facility required? A parallel study is also under way to evaluate and quantify the importance of the Centre for Yellowknife tourism, economy, and scoping possible sources of funding for either renovation or replacement.

With numbers like the ones I've cited today, it's hard to imagine how any study could fail to establish that the Centre is an essential piece of Yellowknife tourism infrastructure. I'm raising these accomplishments today to salute the contribution of the Centre and its staff to the vitality of the Yellowknife economy. I'm raising the Centre's needs to reinforce how continued support and assistance from this government must ensure this

economic locus doesn't suffer from a lack of wisely invested new resources. I'm sure all the Yellowknife MLAs are going to be watching closely for the results of the engineering and economic studies as well. I'll have some questions later today for the Minister of Tourism. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.