

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 503-18(2): NORTHERN FRONTIERS VISITORS' CENTRE

February 1, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment. I apologize, I didn't give him much of a head's up, but he heard my Member's statement, so it's about the Northern Frontiers Visitors' Centre. I know he's been in there, he's seen the condition of the building, but based on the statistics that I mentioned earlier would the Minister agree that the Northern Frontiers Visitors' Centre is an indispensable facility for capital city tourism? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Member had it in his statement today, all the facts that he's brought forward with the increased tourism in the Northwest Territories, which we are totally supportive of to help develop our economy, we are totally in support of trying to help alleviate the burden on the Northern Frontier Visitors' Centre, and I'm sure he's going to have more questions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Laughter

MR. O'REILLY: It's not often that I actually get to congratulate a Minister, but, hey, that's fantastic. What a great lead-in to my next question.

Can the Minister tell us how his department is consulting on and contributing to the completion of the assessment that I mentioned earlier on the condition of the building? Is the department prepared to move forward on the recommendations that come out of that study really quickly?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: I guess, to inform the House, there are a couple of things going on. Public Works and Services and ITI are involved in a couple of things on this facility, and so is CanNor.

There are two parallel streams going forward. We've hired an engineering firm to look at and do the structural investigation on the facility and what can be done and what needs to be done if anything can be done. At the same time, CanNor has supplied some money to do a business case on how do we move that forward for the Northern Frontier Visitors' Information Centre. That business case will decide if the current building meets the needs of tourism in the Northwest Territories, and particularly Yellowknife. It will also address do we need a new space, if that's going to be big enough or not, and the program delivery. So there are two things going on right now. We are waiting to hear back on the engineering firm and the business case.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks to the Minister for that response. He confirms what I said in my statement, where there's a couple of different studies going on. I'm just wondering if the Minister can tell us, though, is there any funding in the 2017-18 capital or O and M budget with regard to additional assistance for the Northern Frontier Visitors' Centre?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: I would have to double check that with the department, but I know we are waiting to get both of those studies back before we decide the next steps on how we can help with the Northern Frontier Visitors' Centre.

There are a number of parties that would be involved in this, depending on what the reports come back. There is ourselves. There is the City of Yellowknife. The Northern Frontier Visitors' Information Centre is a standalone organization. When this building was built in the early '90s, there were a number of people that contributed to building this, from the federal government to the territorial government to the City of Yellowknife. Once we get these reports back, we'll be glad to keep the House advised on how the next steps are going to be on this.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the Minister for that response. I'm aware that there's a number of other visitors' centres in the Northwest Territories. We've got one at the border. There's one in Inuvik. I believe there's one in Fort McPherson. These operations are basically run as government offices.

There is significant support for these other centres, so can the Minister give me information about what sort of support is provided to these other centres? One of the models that's being considered for the Northern Frontier Visitors' Centre is to basically turn it into a government operation. Can he just tell me a little bit more about what the other support is for other centres and whether he's prepared to look at that as a model for the visitors' centre here? Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll get back to the department and pull together how we fund and operate these other tourism centres in the Northwest Territories. I know in particular in Hay River, it's the Hay River Tourism Information Centre, but I believe we actually probably give them some kind of contribution to help offset some of the costs, but I will get that information together and give it to the Member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.