

**ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE**

**QUESTION 640-18(2): IMPROVING CONSUMER PROTECTION**

**February 23, 2017**

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**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, monsieur le President. I would like to go back to my own favourite Minister, the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. The situation for consumer protection that I described earlier today, I think, is one that requires some improvement. I would like to think there is more to a complaints process than hoping customers can work it out with retailers. Can the Minister tell me what specific actions her department is taking to protect our consumers, tourists, and the reputation of our Northern products? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Masi. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actions that we are currently taking to address the needs of consumers within the Northwest Territories, basically I want to state that we don't get a lot of complaints. First of all, we have only gotten 18 complaints in the last three years. Changes to the act are usually made based on the number of complaints that we receive. We are wondering if that is maybe a communication problem.

In this fiscal year, we have developed a plain-language guide on the current consumer affairs programming and what we do. Within that guide we have where we explain the government's role in consumer protection, we are explaining consumer's rights and their responsibilities, we are explaining the consumer's protections available for the residents of the Northwest Territories in the areas that we currently regulate, and we are providing a simple method by which residents can lodge consumer complaints. This document will be spread widely this coming spring, and we will be looking at a broader campaign to improve consumer awareness. Basically, what we are doing right now is trying to put in awareness that we are there and just letting the consumers know where they can go to for assistance on consumer issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks to the Minister for her response. It is good to hear that there is a campaign that is going to get under way, and I look forward to getting a copy of the booklet.

We have a lot of tourists who come through the Northwest Territories, and they really do rely on making sure that our advertising is accurate and fair. I know our government does license tourism operators, although it might be a different Minister. What kind of collaboration is there between MACA, consumer affairs staff, and ITI tourism licensing staff to ensure tourists and the reputation of our Northern products are protected?

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs regularly works with ITI on consumer-related tourism issues. However, most of them are related to public safety, such as fire protection, etc. Again, we haven't had a lot of

complaints. We tend to work when we have complaints in the area. Any time there is an issue, we work cross-departmentally to define those. We also work federally as well, because the federal government also has a role in consumer complaints. When the issues are federal, we will work with them as well to address the issues.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks again to the Minister for that response. Once we promote consumer protection a little bit better, maybe there is going to be a need for better collaboration there too. I am just wondering if the ministry can tell me when the last comprehensive review of the consumer protection act was undertaken?

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** The last review to the *Consumer Protection Act* was last updated in 2011. However, it was only looked at in relation to the cost-of-credit disclosure, so that was the last time that the act was actually reviewed.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, monsieur le President. It is good to know that the last time it was looked at was 2011, and I understand that the Minister has a lot on her plate in terms of legislation. We have got 911; *City, Towns, and Villages Act*, *Fire Prevention Act*, and so on. It seems to be a long legislative slumber in the department going on. I am not making it a demand for immediate action on this issue of improving consumer protection, but can the Minister commit to placing the need for improved consumer protection into the departmental business planning and report to the standing committee this fall with when we can expect some further improvements in the Consumer Protection Act? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In an effort to try to keep as many of the Regular MLAs saying that I am their favourite Minister, what I will do is I will add these changes to the list of acts and regulations that we will be bringing to the five committees to review it on their priority list so that the committees actually can delegate which are the priorities, which ones we should be dealing with first. Then I can bring that back to the MLAs.