

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

**QUESTION 652-18(2): EARNSCLIFFE STRATEGY GROUP CONTRACT**

**February 28, 2017**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations. On January 31<sup>st</sup> of this year, I submitted a written question on the costs of the November 2016 Cabinet trip to Ottawa. As part of that question, I asked for costs of lobbyist support, including contracted services. The Minister responded by stating, "No lobbyists or consultants were engaged in the planning or coordination of this trip."

The third quarter report on GNWT sole-source contracting shows that, between April 1 and December 31, 2016, we retained Earnscliffe Strategy Group, with an office in Ottawa, to lobby on our behalf at a cost \$126,800. Can the Minister confirm that we retained Earnscliffe Strategy Group and what was it that they were doing for us during that period? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Masi. The honourable Premier.

**HON. BOB MCLEOD:** Yes, I can confirm that the Government of the Northwest Territories has a contract with Earnscliffe Strategy Group of Ottawa, and they provide government relations and media relations services. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I thank the Premier for his response. The Earnscliffe Strategy Group is a registered lobbyist under federal legislation, and they fully disclose that GNWT is one of its clients, as shown in a filing that I will table later today. The period of its service to the GNWT includes a period where our entire Cabinet went to Ottawa. Did the Earnscliffe Strategy Group provide any advice or support for the planning or execution of the November trip by all of Cabinet?

**HON. BOB MCLEOD:** Earnscliffe was not directly involved in preparing any materials or strategies for Cabinet's November 2016 mission to Ottawa and did not have a role in setting up any meetings with federal government officials.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks to the Premier for that response, as well. So, if they weren't providing advice or support, can the Minister provide a little bit more detail about what we paid \$126,800 for, exactly what kind of services? Maybe a few examples would be helpful.

**HON. BOB MCLEOD:** We use Earnscliffe to provide strategic information, and they do provide briefings. They did provide briefings to our government on the government environment in Ottawa. They do provide information on federal legislation, the work that is being done there, and also policy priorities.

Between the period that the Member refers to, they provided ongoing advice on our federal engagement strategy development on federal infrastructure engagement. They also supported us by providing communication support at Government of the Northwest Territories-hosted events related to the Aboriginal Affairs working group meetings that

we held in Ottawa, including organizing and hosting news conferences. They have provided ad hoc meetings with our deputy minister, as well, in Ottawa, including deputy ministers attending the infrastructure roundtable, and also worked with Minister Sebert's appearance in September on federal electoral reform panels.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Premier for providing those details. As I understood, the trip to Ottawa that all of Cabinet went on was precisely as part of this federal engagement strategy and the three pitches that they made when they were down there. In any event, I will move on.

One of the commitments that we made in our mandate was increasing transparency and accountability and strengthening consensus government, so a knowledge of the lobbying activities of the executive would help make us more transparent and accountable. Does the Minister believe we should have lobbyist registration regulation legislation for the Northwest Territories? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. BOB MCLEOD:** Thank you. I'm not aware of any lobbyists in the Northwest Territories, but we do provide information. We put it on the website, government website, of all the meetings that we have. Certainly, in our trip to Ottawa, we set up the meetings ourselves. We do not need to hire people to set up meetings for us.