

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

GIANT MINE OVERSIGHT BOARD RESEARCH FUNDING

March 3, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. On February 6th, I made a Member's statement about the Giant Mine Oversight Board and its office opening here in Yellowknife. I described the two main functions of the board, sound technical oversight of the Giant Mine Remediation Project and a research program.

This project was sent to an environmental assessment based on public concerns. One of the main issues was the absence of any commitment or funding for ongoing research and development to find a better solution than simply trying to freeze 137,000 tons of toxic arsenic trioxide underground forever. The Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board recognized this public concern and recommended measures to require ongoing research and development into emerging technologies for a permanent solution at Giant Mine. Those measures were accepted by federal and territorial Ministers and are now legally binding. The details of the active research program were left to the negotiation of the legally binding environmental agreement.

I am proud to say that I was involved in those negotiations that created the Giant Mine Oversight Board, with its role in coordinating a research program into a permanent solution. The funding for the research program comes from the federal government, and work has started to identify opportunities and priorities for the research. A very important part of the negotiations and the ultimate agreement was the need for funding for the research. Every effort will be made to leverage and partner, but there must be money to invest. Everyone agreed that unused funds from the oversight function would be rolled into the research program and that any unused funds would be carried over to build a critical nest egg for the research program. Without knowing what the research might be, but certainly understanding how expensive it will likely be, all the parties, including the federal government agreed the funds should be allowed to accumulate over time to support this work. This is money that will be managed and spent in the NWT to the benefit of all Yellowknifers now and into the future.

The board had a surplus of \$65,000 in 2015-16, largely the result of a late start in getting set up partway through that year. It looks like the board may have a surplus of about \$100,000 to \$200,000 this year. These funds should be rolled into the research program, but there seems to be a roadblock with Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. The rollover is not happening. This a very serious breach of the spirit, intent, and letter of the Giant Mine Environmental Agreement.

I wouldn't raise this issue in the House if it were about a few thousand dollars, but this goes to the very heart of why Yellowknifers lost confidence in how government was attempting to remediate the Giant Mine. I trust that our government is working diligently behind the scenes to ensure that the federal government lives up to the promises it made to invest in a permanent solution for Giant Mine. I will have questions later today for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. Masi, Mr. Speaker.