

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 707-18(2): NEW MINERAL RESOURCES ACT

March 7, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment. Can the Minister highlight what he and his department seek to achieve through a Mineral Resources Act? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The department is looking at a number of things under the Mineral Resource Act moving forward: acquiring mineral rights, ministry and royalties, those sorts of things. We have no intention of regulating mining activities under the proposed MRA. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I appreciate the response from the Minister. I will help him out with what the MVRMA is all about. In my statement, I highlighted several issues that I think should be considered during the drafting of a Mineral Resources Act. I would like to know whether the Minister and his department intend to seek specific exemptions or exceptions for mining activities now regulated under the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. Are we going to loosen up or weaken our environmental regime to allow mining to go ahead?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: The department is actually conducting research right now on how we are going to move forward. I don't think anything is locked down because we are going to have to go through consultation, public engagement. We are going to have to go in front of standing committee. There are a number of things that we are going to have to do that are going to guide this document as we move forward. We are welcome to any suggestions.

MR. O'REILLY: I appreciate the response from the Minister. I think the first time he responded he said that there wasn't going to be any specific exceptions. The next time he is a little bit vaguer. There have been several cases of conflicting land uses in the NWT and elsewhere that highlight the problem with the free entry system. Recently, the BC Mines Minister had the ground under his home staked. There have been problems with staking of claims covering the Inuvik gravel supply and so on. The NWT Association of Communities has called for local governments to have the authority to prohibit mineral staking within their boundaries. Is the Minister prepared to work with the NWTAC and communities to give this authority to our local governments?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: As I said, this is early days on this. We are going to draft some stuff and have a look at other jurisdictions, how things are conducted around minerals in other jurisdictions in Canada. We will be seeking input, as I have said, from a number of people and stakeholders in the Northwest Territories, and we are open to any suggestions and stuff as we move forward.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Thanks, again to the Minister for repeating the openness of the process that we are about to embark on, but I am looking for some direction. What is this government actually going to do? I am not hearing it. I will keep pushing because I have some ideas. Like the honourable Member from Hay River North, I have some ideas I would like to share, and I want to see the Minister respond to these sorts of ideas.

With the devolution, our government now has the authority over royalties paid by mining companies. I am sure the Minister, along with his Cabinet colleagues, wants to make sure that we retain as many benefits as possible from mining, including royalties. Earlier in the House, I noted that we collect three times as much money from taxes on tobacco and liquor as we get to keep in resource revenues under devolution. What is the Minister going to do to ensure there is a fair and comprehensive review of mining royalties and taxation? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The department hasn't taken a determination on this point yet. We are looking out for ideas and stuff. We are currently looking at other jurisdictions, as I have said, across Canada before we roll this out. We will probably be conducting a review and undertaking an analysis on a royalty regime across Canada.