

## **MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE**

### **NORTHERN FRONTIER VISITORS CENTRE**

**May 25, 2017**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. There has been a lot of shock and uncertainty over the closure of the Northern Frontier Visitors' Centre here in Yellowknife. I firmly believe this could have been avoided through adequate and equitable support from our government. We have been without a visitors' centre for 10 days now. A temporary home has been found, until summer's end, at the museum. Now we need to concentrate on a longer-term location to support the large, growing, and sustainable tourism sector in Yellowknife.

Aurora tourism has soared from a \$6 million industry in 2010 to \$40 million in 2015-2016. A recent study indicates that our visitors' centre boosts tourist expenditures by about \$5 million annually. Our centre received over 50,000 visitors last year, far more than all of the other centres in the NWT put together.

It is inconceivable that Yellowknife would not have a tourist information and interpretive centre, and a world-class one. We must find a new permanent location. So who is to pay for that?

Figures supplied by the Minister show that visitors' centres at the Highway 1 border crossing in Inuvik and in Dawson are owned or leased by the GNWT. GNWT also pays over \$100,000 for the staff and operating costs of each of these centres that are only open over the summer. Here in Yellowknife, the centre was owned by a non-profit society that received only \$160,000 in GNWT core funding support last year, and it was open year-round, seven days a week.

This is not only unfair, it is poor support for this success story and economic diversification in general. The current emergency situation has been looming for years, with no effective or proactive support from this government. We can't allow that to continue. We need to get to work now on costing and identifying funds for a new, permanent location, operated with GNWT funds. I will have questions for the Minister later today. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.