

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 826-18(2): IMPACT OF GRAYS BAY PORT AND ROAD PROJECT

September 19, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Lands in his capacity for coordinating GNWT input into environmental assessments such as the Grays Bay Port and Road Project in Nunavut. What is the GNWT understanding of the status of the Bathurst caribou herd, and how does that influence our input into environmental assessments? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Lands.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the government is responsible for the management, habitat conservation, and sustainable use of barren ground caribou and collaborates with Aboriginal governments and organizations, co-management boards, and communities. The GNWT carefully reviews the details of each project proposal with respect to its caribou responsibilities and provides evidence and recommendations for the consideration of all parties and the assessing body.

The GNWT is continuing to work collaboratively with Nunavut stakeholders and other affected parties on the Bathurst caribou range plan and will continue to engage with Nunavut partners on options to maintain the integrity of the Bathurst calving area. We do realize this is an important issue and it does guide our response to environmental projects that are coming forward.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks to the Minister for that response, and I might have to follow up with a different Minister about the status of the Bathurst herd. Later today I'm going to be tabling the comment letter submitted by Department of Lands to the Nunavut Impact Review Board on the Grays Bay Port and Road Project. Several other letters were submitted by the NWT Indigenous governments and they have expressed very serious concerns/reservations about this Grays Bay Port and Road Project because it will cut through the remaining calving grounds of the Bathurst caribou herd. What is the position of our government on the Grays Bay Port and Road Project? Does our government support the project or not, and why?

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: The government supports the Government of Nunavut and the Kitikmeot Inuit Association's recommendation that further environmental review of the project would be valuable, and recommends that the federal government provide participant funding for any such review.

The Government of Nunavut and the Kitikmeot Inuit Association are, of course, the proponents. The GNWT recognizes the potential transboundary economic benefits associated with infrastructure corridors such as the Grays Bay road and port and supports strategic infrastructure developments such as this project.

We heard earlier today that resources make up 40 per cent of our economy, and it's important we support these types of projects. It will be of great benefit not only to

ourselves but Nunavut also and the country at large.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks to the Minister for that response. Several of the Indigenous governments have actually asked that the project be stopped or delayed given the condition of the Bathurst caribou herd, but our government is prepared to support it. This project is going to involve use of winter roads on our side of the boundary, and as the Minister said there are going to be transboundary, environmental, and socioeconomic impacts. I would like the Minister to explain why our government did not call for a full federal panel review under Part 6 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement for the Grays Bay Port and Road Project, which would have included participant funding. It is required under the federal legislation and it could have included representation on the panel from this side of the border, so why did our government not ask for a Part 6 review under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement for the Grays Bay Port and Road Project?

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: The Government of the Northwest Territories believes that Northerners should make decisions that affect Northerners and that the Nunavut Impact Review Board is fully capable of assessing the impacts of this project. We are satisfied that the board has fully considered NWT concerns in previous Part 5 reviews. I think it is under their legislation. We are confident that this project will be fully considered by the Nunavut board, and therefore we are not seeking intervention by the federal government.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the Minister for that. We're not asking for federal intervention. Part 6 is about being sure it's a full federal panel. They're appointed by the federal government and it could have included representation from this side of the border, but we cut off our nose to spite our face.

Clearly, the routing for the Slave Geological Province road was chosen by our government without any regard for caribou as stated by the Minister of Transportation in this House. Can the Minister of Lands tell us what kind of credibility our government can possibly have in any review of the Grays Bay Port and Road Project when we continue to push for a road on our side of the border without any regard to its impacts on the Bathurst caribou herd? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: The Department of Infrastructure is working with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to identify gaps in knowledge and opportunities with respect to caribou population along the proposed corridor, so it's not as though we are in any way ignoring this very important issue; and I realize that this is a complex issue.

I want to repeat, however, that we are concerned about the issue of this caribou herd and that any of our planning will take into account the grave concerns that we've heard about the diminution of the numbers of this caribou herd that travels between Nunavut and ourselves. We are confident, however, in Nunavut's and our processes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.