

Mid-term Review Committee of the 18th Legislative Assembly
Frame Lake MLA Kevin O'Reilly Questions to Minister Caroline
Cochrane
October 4, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I was a bit worried that there's a few of us that have not asked a lot of questions, and we're going to get jammed up here at the end. I have a question for Minister Cochrane as the Minister responsible for the Housing Corporation. We certainly heard a lot in this House about new federal infrastructure funding programs and how that will help the NWT with energy megaprojects and Roads to Resources. I am not convinced that these are going to always fly with the federal government, and they certainly, I don't think, are going to make any meaningful contribution to greenhouse gas reductions, or perhaps even help us with housing needs. I would like the Minister to explain and commit to the preparation of proposals for federal infrastructure funding that will better enable us to meet our climate change and housing needs. Is she prepared to make that commitment? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Lafferty): Masi. Minister Cochrane.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation has been working diligently with the federal government to try to address the housing needs within the Northwest Territories. We are not working alone in that. We are in partnership with the other two territories because it's important that all the territories stand together. We have unique needs that all three territories share that are different than the southern jurisdictions, so we have a tri-territorial partnership. I know that I was asked to be able to share that. That is a public document. It is accessible. We have been negotiating. We've gone down there, and because of our negotiations with the federal government, we actually got \$300 million just recently for the three territories to address the needs of northern residents. They also have made a commitment that they would look at base-plus funding which is a new move because before it was always based on per capita funding. The territorial government and the federal government are working hard to address housing needs within the Northwest Territories. I am always open to feedback from the Regular Members. If they have ideas that they'd like to share with me, I am open to hearing their suggestions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I've spoken in this House before about what I have used, legislative inertia, and I want to pose a question to the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. A big part of that backlog of work I think comes from that department, as well. Earlier today and earlier in the House, as well, she talked about moving forward with some municipal legislation, one of the pieces being the Cities, Town and Villages Act, to empower communities to be able to levy local improvement charges, in particular.

In her statement, she talked about how they had been undertaking months of consultation around this issue. I don't know what that "months of consultation" is really all about, because NWTAC has been on board with this for a long time. The city even provided draft language on what the change had looked like. I don't understand what the problem is here, why there needs to be more or why we have to do months of consultation. What kind of assurance can the Minister provide that this important piece of work is actually going to get done in the next two years? Merci, Mr. Chair.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister Cochrane.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs does try to engage with as many stakeholders as possible, and I do support that they do that work. I think it is important that we hear from all people who are affected. The Cities, Town and Villages Act was supported. The recommendations were supported by the NWT Association of Communities at an AGM. However, as soon as that AGM was finished, there were some municipalities that actually approached the department and said that they had concerns, so we did have to go back to them to hear what their concerns were. We have met with the City of Yellowknife and the tax-based communities over the last few months. They are in support of it, but we are still finishing up the piece because there are other stakeholders, as well.

I know that we have met with the Chamber of Commerce; they are in agreement with it. We are meeting with the hotel association to find out where they stand with it, so we are right at the end of the stakeholder engagement. I can promise that that legislation will be put forward before two years, and as long as there is no contention from the other side, it will be passed within two years. Thank you, Mr. Chair.