

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 107-18(3): PTARMIGAN MINE REMEDIATION PROJECT

FEBRUARY 14, 2018

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are not on the procurement policy. They are for the Minister of Lands. Earlier today, I spoke about the recent acquisition of the mineral rights for the abandoned Ptarmigan Mine and the problems this may cause for remediation of this site and perhaps other contaminated sites. Can the Minister of Lands tell us the current status of remediation at the Ptarmigan Mine? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Lands.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can advise that, while no reclamation or remediations have started at the site, the GNWT did complete a Phase III Environmental Site Assessment and remedial action plan. This work was done in preparation for meetings with the federal government to determine respective liabilities with respect to this site, and I can advise that GNWT officials, I think from Lands and ENR, met with Indigenous and Northern Affairs representatives to discuss the outcomes of the Phase III assessments and remedial action plans that were completed on that site and some other sites in 2017. The GNWT is specifically reviewing the Ptarmigan file to determine how best to negotiate the associated liabilities and costs.

We have done some risk mitigation with respect to the site, including placement of signage to restrict access, erecting a fence surrounding the main structures, placement of a gate, and placement of boulders and ditching completed at another access point, so that work has been done, but no reclamation or remediation activity has actually taken place yet.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks to the Minister for that information. Can he tell us, then: have there been any cost estimates prepared for the reclamation/remediation work at Ptarmigan Mine? How much is it going to cost the taxpayers to remediate this site?

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I can advise that we are still in negotiations with respect to that matter, the situation as to who will be responsible for the liabilities. I believe that I did correspond with the Member opposite. An estimate for the Ptarmigan Mine remediation outlined a cost in excess of \$4 million.

MR. O'REILLY: Again, I would like to thank the Minister for that information. It's not clear how TerraX was able to acquire the mineral rights for the Ptarmigan Mine while it's under remediation, but this would seem to complicate these efforts, as exploration may interfere with the need to restrict access to the site. Drilling and sampling and trenching, that could disturb tailings, covers from vegetation efforts and so on.

I would like to know from the Minister: does GNWT, and/or the federal government for that matter, withdraw the mineral rights for sites that are under remediation such as the

Ptarmigan Mine site, and if not, why not?

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: With respect to the site referenced by the Member opposite, the Ptarmigan site, mineral rights, rather, were issued prior to devolution by Indian and Northern Affairs, which was responsible for subservice rights and tenure. I understand, under the devolution agreement, our government has to respect existing interests at the time of devolution, including mineral interests that existed at the Ptarmigan site.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I appreciate the answer from the Minister. I can tell him, though, that the mineral rights had been withdrawn underneath Giant Mine, so I don't know why we don't ensure that mineral rights are withdrawn for sites that are being remediated or under consideration for remediation. I want to move on.

TerraX indicates in its news release that it has no responsibility for environmental contamination remediation of the Ptarmigan Mine site. Can the Minister tell us whether TerraX was given any kind of an indemnity or release by GNWT or Canada in acquiring these mineral rights, and how the company can make such claims in its news release? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: I also had the opportunity of looking at the press release, which does contain the line that TerraX has no liability for any remediation of the previous mine site. I can advise that this government has not given an indemnification.

I cannot speak for what the federal government may have done. I do know, however, that press releases by public companies have to be very careful in their assertions. All I can say, again, is that we did not indemnify them with respect to those liabilities. Thank you.