

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

**QUESTION 310-18(3):
DOMINION DIAMONDS EKATI MINE LAYOFFS**

MAY 28, 2018

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Last week I tabled a news release from the Tlicho government expressing concern over recent moves by Dominion Diamond to lay off 150 unionized employees at the Ekati Mine and replace them with contract miners. I'm not aware of any public statements or positions taken by our government to retain these jobs. My question is for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment: has our government received any official notice or communications from Dominion Diamond about these layoffs at Ekati of the unionized employees; and if so, can the Minister provide details on timing, alleged attendance issues, or any other details? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: No, I have not received any official notice from the Dominion Diamond Mines about this situation. What I can update this House, I did have a conversation with Dominion Diamonds at one point a number of months ago around the concern of high absentee of employees at the site. He said that, at that point, it was something of a concern of theirs, and when I'd seen it in the paper, that is the first time I have actually seen it in writing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I would like to thank the Minister for that information. I note that, in the socio-economic agreement covering this project, it says, "Selection, hiring, promoting transferring, dismissing, or otherwise disciplining of all of its employees for the jobs on the project shall be within the sole discretion of Dominion Diamond." It is kind of disappointing to me that we don't really have any hooks on this and that they may not even be required to provide notice to us. Does our government have any authority or power to protect these union jobs that are largely held by long-time and Indigenous NWT residents?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: One thing, let's make it quite clear, most of these jobs, as I have been informed, are mostly NWT residents, and we are quite concerned about that. Particularly as the Minister of ITI, I have a very big concern about that. We want to keep these jobs in our territory, but, at the same time, this is an issue between the union and Dominion Diamond. If there is an issue that they can't work out and they want someone to help facilitate, I would certainly direct my department to try to help them do that. We want to make sure that Dominion Diamond, regardless of the outcome of this, that they meet their socio-economic commitments in their agreements.

MR. O'REILLY: I would like to thank the Minister for that, but how is he going to do it? Is the Minister prepared to reach out and actually talk to Dominion Diamond about these layoffs and stop them?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: We have the SEAs. That is what requires them to base

their commitments on. That is what we try to hold them accountable to. At the end of the day, this is something that we want to see the union and the company work out, if possible. We are certainly concerned about it. We are willing to help, like I said, facilitate anything to help move this forward, but, at the end of the day, if they cannot come to an agreement to continue on with these 150 employees, labour law is the ultimate responsibility of the federal government, but we will keep an eye on this situation. I will certainly have discussions with the president of Dominion Diamond.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. I think I heard him almost say that he was going to try to meet with the president of Dominion Diamond about this. You know, this is a Minister who is very interested in promoting mining and all of the benefits that it can bring. We have these jobs now in the Northwest Territories. We need our government and Cabinet to actually step up to the plate and do something to protect them, so what is Cabinet's position on this issue, and what is the Minister prepared to do about it?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Yes, I am the champion of mining in the Northwest Territories, and I will continue to do that. At the same time, this is an agreement between Dominion Diamond and their employees and the union, and this is something that needs to be worked out between them. We do not impose ourselves on contracts or employees in a manner that tries to tell a private business how to run their business. I will not do that, but I am very concerned about meeting our socio-economic agreements, and we will work with all parties involved to try to ensure as many northern jobs are protected and that commitments are met in the socio-economic agreements. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.