

## KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE

### MOTION 23-18(3): REVOCATION OF THE APPOINTMENT OF THE HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR HAY RIVER SOUTH, DEFEATED

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. I have tried very carefully to choose my words here today. I take the issue of removal of a Cabinet Minister very seriously.

There is nothing personal in how I have arrived at my decision on the two Ministers up for review. This is about getting results for NWT residents and whether we have the right team in place for doing this for the remainder of our term. I personally like the Minister under discussion. I believe he brings valuable experience to this Assembly and has made a valuable contribution. However, I must assess his progress objectively on mandate items and handling of several important files.

I supported the purchase of the NTCL assets and the formation of Marine Transportation Services. This was a necessary step to ensure that we can continue to resupply our communities for a reasonable cost. I have no problem with MTS competing for private shipping contracts to ensure an efficient use of our assets. That should drive down shipping costs for our communities. What I do have issues with is the lack of involvement of Regular MLAs in developing a long-term approach to MTS and accountability and transparency around MTS. I disagreed with the way the MTS revolving fund was fast-tracked, and decisions that any surpluses not be used for environmental remediation.

At the same time, I also have concerns about the way Cabinet continues to use appropriations for expenditures that should be rightfully assigned to the revolving fund and how large capital items are amortized over very long periods of time. Reporting to the public and MLAs definitely needs to be improved, and the recent shipping failure to coastal communities is a prime example of poor communications. I heard about problems through the media. I asked the Minister for clarification and had to wait days for a response. I don't think we are out of the woods yet, especially with very significant airlift costs yet to be assigned to at least two revolving funds without an overall plan for now and into the future.

I have worked very hard to convince the Minister that we need real economic diversification for the NWT that includes much greater investment in tourism. The Northern Frontier Visitors' Centre was in my riding. If the funds now being spent on that building had been invested even 18 months ago, I am convinced we would still have a functioning centre here in Yellowknife. I just don't understand why we spend more on a visitors' centre in Dawson, Yukon, than we do in our capital city.

I have openly criticized the overwhelming focus of the Minister on large infrastructure projects, roads to resources, and the lack of social infrastructure investments and submissions to the federal government, particularly in the areas of housing, tourism,

culture, and building the knowledge and conservation economies. Roads scaled to our capacity to retain benefits and in areas with fewer serious impacts can provide economic development opportunities. However, the relentless pursuit of large projects such as the Slave Geological Province Road and Taltson expansion have not received adequate analysis and have precluded any serious efforts at diversification.

I am deeply disturbed by the so-called Resources and Energy Development Information, REDI, initiative that is more about promotion of resource development than about providing balanced information and tools to enable citizen participation in resource development decisions. It also includes the use of educational materials in our schools that are about promotion of mining rather than giving our students balanced information and skills to make informed decisions.

The Minister has also refused to carry out any kind of review of onshore hydraulic fracturing, even though it is part of our mandate and while our government has agreed to a science-based, life-cycle impact assessment review of offshore development.

The most serious issue with the leadership of the Minister, in my view, is the failure to undertake any review of the resource revenues that we now can control following devolution. Such a review was promised when I asked questions early on during the life of this Assembly and was even within the scope of the issues to be addressed in the Mineral Resources Act.

While billions of dollars of resources are extracted here each year, revenues to our government have been described by an international expert as paltry and our management as "one of the world's most charitable fiscal regimes for the mining sector." We need to start acting in the public interest and ensure there is a fair return for this one-time natural capital. I have recommended an independent review to the Minister on numerous occasions, but he has refused to do this during the life of this Assembly. I believe that refusing to even look at the idea in the face of learned evidence challenging the adequacy of our revenue regime is an instance of stubborn refusal on the part of this Minister, for which I hold him accountable.

If we are going to have a Minister who is responsible for both promoting and regulating resource development, we need that Minister to take a balanced approach where the public interest is put before the interests of the private sector. I want mining, too, as much as anybody else, but we must do a much better job at retaining the benefits and doing it in a sustainable way. We have failed to evolve after the devolve and truly demonstrate we can responsibly manage our resources.

Mr. Speaker, for all these reasons, I cannot support the Minister continuing in his current role. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.