

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

NICO PROJECT SOCIO-ECONOMIC AGREEMENT

February 5, 2019

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I have not had much good to say about the socio-economic agreements signed by this government. Another one, for the NICO Project, was signed on January 29, 2019, at a mining conference in Vancouver.

I will be the first to admit that this most recent agreement is better than the previous ones, but there is still a long way to go to generate and retain real benefits for Northwest Territories residents. Improvements in this most recent agreement include:

- Employment and purchasing targets are set for the closure phase;
- A staffed office in the Northwest Territories is to be established, primarily for human resources purposes;
- There are specific targets for training, apprenticeships, and educational awards;
- A training and learning centre in Whati is to be created;
- Equal opportunity strategies are set out for women;
- A social legacy project is to be carried out, but there is no requirement for consultation, no notice, and no specified value; and
- Annual reports are public, and there are to be annual community visits.

Then there are the familiar deficiencies. The failure of the agreement to set or require any form of sanctions or penalties for non-compliance renders it rather meaningless. It is another best efforts arrangement. It is not clear how the reviews of previous socio-economic agreements have fed into this new one. The review that I tabled in the House in the last sitting was highly critical of our previous efforts to capture and retain benefits, and this agreement is not a whole lot better.

Of greatest concern is the timing and lack of consultation with the Tlicho government, which boycotted the signing in Vancouver. On the face of it, the lack of consultation appears to be a breach of Chapter 23 of the Tlicho Agreement and certainly not in accordance with GNWT's Respect, Recognition and Responsibility Approach to Engaging with Aboriginal Governments.

The signing of this agreement also comes just before the new Mineral Resources Act is brought forward that could raise the bar for benefits agreements. The signing of this agreement seems to be more of a news event to show how the NWT is open for the mining industry than a serious effort at benefit retention. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.