

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 686-18(3): NORTHWEST TERRITORIES CONSUMER RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS

March 12, 2019

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. In responding to my Committee of the Whole questions, the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs agreed that there is a significant line-up of new legislation needed within his department. I think that there is some sort of transition process in place to prioritize that work. Can the Minister give us more details on how a recommended roadmap for new MACA legislation is being developed for transition to the next Assembly and how committees, or even the public, can influence that shopping list? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. MACA has made a commitment to help identify legislative priorities, like any other department, and bring them to the next Assembly on a community perspective. Part of the rationale for this effort is to bring forward legislative amendments that have the largest and most positive impact for our community governments. The key for MACA is to understand what the issues are with our legislation, of course, and get that information.

Most recently, we just had a meeting with the NWT Association of Communities. Obviously, we also want to hear from the Local Government and Public Administration Committee. They can play a role in this. Really, any Member of the Legislative Assembly can bring forward what they think needs to be done, especially going through this transition into the next government. I think that a really good example is Bill 31, with the changes that we have made in just developing the 911 Act and the collaborative effort that we had from municipalities, as well as committee, in working on that bill. Those are our stakeholders to give us the input, but a community perspective on the legislation moving forward into the next government is what we are focusing on. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. If it is not a secret, I think that consumer protection should be on that shopping list. I appreciate that we are not going to be able to start drafting new laws before the end of this Assembly, but some preparatory work can begin now. I gave the Minister a heads-up here. Is the Minister aware of the Charter of Consumer Rights that the Consumers Council of Canada have developed and how that work might guide the department's work on consumer protection in future legislative change?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Yes, and I appreciate the Member for sharing some of this information with me previously. The department is familiar with the Consumer Bill of Rights, and so am I, with the information that has been posted.

However, it is my understanding that it has not been an integral part of our ongoing provincial-territorial-federal dialogue concerning consumer affairs matters. Its principles,

however, certainly offer a very good foundation for most consumer protection regimes throughout Canada. I will commit to the Member, as I have done at federal-provincial-territorial meetings, that I will share this with my jurisdictional colleagues in terms of consumer rights, either by an email or at the very next meeting.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. I appreciate that he is going to raise this at the next federal-provincial-territorial meeting on consumer affairs with his colleagues that he works with. I think that is a good step. In my statement today I spoke about cross-jurisdictional issues that can sometimes frustrate consumers, and those include things like air carriers, flight complaints, and those sort of things. Can the Minister explain how he works with his federal counterparts in terms of consumer rights and protection?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As you heard in the earlier question, I will be making that commitment. However, MACA does engage on an ongoing basis with federal consumer protection agencies through the federal-provincial-territorial Consumer Measures Committee, and this body does serve as a valuable information source and policy development mechanism for issues of common interest, such as developing harmonized legislation for consumer protection and the sharing of education materials for consumers. As I have said in the previous question that the Member asked, I will be making a commitment to ensure that the Consumer Bill of Rights is something that we will be bringing to consideration when we are looking at this, as well.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. While I'm on a roll, here, and I do appreciate the commitment of the Minister, one of the areas that NWT residents to participate increasingly in is online purchasing. Has our Consumer Protection Branch seen an upswing in complaints in this area, and has the branch developed any advice or guidelines for online shopping to ensure that NWT consumers have the tools to avoid scams? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: I can't give the Member the exact number of complaints that we have seen, but that's something that we can take a look at and see if there has been an increase over the years. Also, the department has not developed education materials directly related to online shopping, but it is something that does need to be addressed, as a lot of things are happening online these days. However, within the last six months the department has released consumer information bulletins on gift cards and payday loans, and some of those relate to airline travel complaints, gasoline prices, and we will continue to look at where else we can make that information available to the consumers throughout the Northwest Territories. I will commit to that. I can also commit that we will look at how many complaints we have seen over the last couple of years. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.