

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

NORTHERN FRONTIER VISITORS CENTRE

May 29, 2019

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I will come back today to the too-long and too-twisted tale of the former Northern Frontiers Visitors' Centre and the lack of progress re-establishing a tourist information centre for Yellowknife. It's been more than two years since the facility closed.

Back in February 2017, the Minister of Infrastructure told me that his staff were working to stabilize the building and had "recently gone out for expressions of interest on possible design opportunities." Northern Frontiers Visitors' Association board produced a report detailing the estimated \$5 million in additional tourism business generated by the centre and offered three costed options for redesign and relocation of the facility. Despite these efforts, the building closed in May 2017, and the visitors' operation hopped to the museum, then to the basement of Yellowknife City Hall, where it has been located ever since. When I asked the Minister a year later, in February 2018, what progress towards a new centre had come from the design studies, he said, "I think it's a bit early to make a decision on that yet. We are working with the City of Yellowknife to determine the long-term model of delivery of the visitors' information centre." So much for 2017 and 2018.

In the February 2019 budget session, I asked the Minister for a status report yet again and was told the building is still being stabilized and that the infrastructure department has "recently gone out for expressions of interest on possible design opportunities." Media reports have since informed us that \$125,000 has been spent to stabilize the building that officials describe as "just barely surviving" and that \$75,000 was split between three design companies for their ideas on building redevelopment.

Presumably, with all of these suggestions, in addition to the recommendations paid for in 2017, we have a lot to look at. Others use have proceeded in parallel, including the passage of a law enabling the City of Yellowknife to finance a destination marketing program, but that doesn't result in a storefront visitors centre helping our 70,000 annual visitors spend more money in Yellowknife and beyond.

Later today I hope to have questions for the Minister to find out what is going on with the building and how we can improve visitor services for Yellowknife moving forward. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.