

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 796-18(3): LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER CO-SIGNED WITH CONSERVATIVE PREMIERS

August 13, 2019

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Earlier today I raised concerns about a letter that the Premier signed with five provincial Premiers that threaten national unity. Can the Premier confirm that the document I tabled in the House yesterday is indeed the text of the letter that he signed on June 10, 2019, to the Prime Minister of Canada, and can he table that letter in this House? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. The Honourable Premier.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I haven't seen the letter that the Member tabled as of yet. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Of course, the Premier is under no obligation to actually answer questions, but if he does have that letter, the signed version, it would be great to see it. Can the Premier tell us whether he consulted or informed his Cabinet colleagues about this letter before it was signed and sent?

HON. BOB MCLEOD: We all spent about six months working together on developing a mandate for the Government of the Northwest Territories. As part of signing this letter, it was to promote five mandate items that were in the mandate. The work with some of the Premiers related to Bill C-69 also allowed me to advance Northwest Territories interests, including ensuring efficient and effective regulatory process for transboundary projects and in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region; also to promote oil and gas; and also mining and other significant projects. Why it was so critical, I felt, is because it would apply to projects critical to the Northwest Territories' economic future and where major projects could conceivably be subjected to two full assessments.

If the Government of the Northwest Territories wants a pipeline built to Alberta, BC, or north through the ISR, or a hydroelectric transmission line built to Alberta or Saskatchewan, or a Slave Province road connected to Nunavut, the Impact Assessment Act provided for under Bill C-69 will apply. We adhere to the principle of one project, one assessment, and we will continue to work towards that.

MR. O'REILLY: Once again, the Premier didn't answer my question about whether he actually consulted with his Cabinet colleagues about this letter before it was signed and sent.

I explained in my statement earlier today that these pieces of federal legislation that the Minister cited have very little, if any, application in the Northwest Territories. Of course, the Premier knows very well that the Mackenzie Gas Project was assessed under three different regimes, and of course, it was done through an agreed-upon arrangement under those three different regimes. I suspect any transboundary project would be done in the same way.

Can the Premier tell us in this House and, indeed, all residents of the Northwest Territories why he signed such a partisan and threatening letter?

HON. BOB MCLEOD: With the five mandate items that directed that we make progress in a number of areas, including oil and gas and also investments in our natural resources, in our view, if the energy sector in southern Canada disappears, then there is very little hope for further investments in oil and gas in the Northwest Territories, and it would affect future developments.

I felt that it was important to make sure that our concerns were addressed. It is very difficult for a small territory to get their interests addressed at a national level, and so I have made it a practice to work with all three of the leading parties in Canada to make sure that our interests are represented and, also, working very closely with my Premier colleagues in Canada to help us advance our interests.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I am glad to hear that the Premier is in such a collaborative mood today. I hope that he can actually start to work with Members on this side of the House.

Earlier I cited how, in my view, this was a breach of the guiding principles of consensus government. I will just quote again: "Except under extraordinary circumstances, Members of the Legislative Assembly should be made aware of and have opportunity to discuss significant announcements, changes, consultations, or initiatives before they are released to the public." I would like to know from the Premier why he breached this guiding principle of consensus government in signing such a letter. It sounds like he may not have informed his Cabinet colleagues, and he certainly didn't inform Regular MLAs. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: There was no breach involved whatsoever. Five mandate items were all agreed to by this Assembly. It is in the mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories. I will be tabling the mandate document before the end of this sitting. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.