

## MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

### FIBRE OPTIC LINK TO COMMUNITIES

August 14, 2019

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. The fibre optic line now runs from Alberta to Inuvik, a project completed in 2017 that will cost about \$95 million and \$3 million a year to operate. That fibre link was funded on the understanding of big community benefits down the Mackenzie Valley. Let's go back and look at the record. As early as 2011, the then-Minister of Health was promoting "a very ambitious plan that would provide a fibre optic link to all the communities. There would be cell phones, Internet, TV, all those systems in the community."

When the budget proposal was reviewed in 2015, the Finance Minister was asked if the proposal was for "getting a fibre optic line right in the homes." He said, "The intention is to have a clear point of presence in all the communities."

The March 2017 media release announcing the completion of the line said that residents and businesses would now have a hook-up point "located in Fort Simpson, Wrigley, Tulita, Norman Wells, Fort Good Hope, Inuvik, and in High Level."

This Finance Minister's 2017 statement in this House said that "the completion of the nearly 1,200-kilometre fibre link brings affordable, high-speed telecommunications to six communities along the Mackenzie Valley, including Inuvik."

Unfortunately for the communities along the route, few of these magical promises have come true. The fibre line hook-up point is not in all the communities. For Fort Simpson, Wrigley, Tulita, Norman Wells, and Fort Good Hope, the fibre line runs past the communities. As I understand it, it will cost \$1 million plus to run the line into the communities. Without that money, the line might as well not be there.

This is extremely serious, Mr. Speaker. The Members of this House approved millions of dollars in expenditures of public funds because the government promised the project would deliver services in these communities, not past them. The justification of improved Internet service for these communities was repeatedly used in approving these expenditures. At the same time, numerous predictions were also made of large revenue streams to help offset the costs of this project.

Later today I will have questions for the Minister of Finance as to why the anticipated improvements to community Internet services along the fibre link have yet to happen and why the anticipated revenues from this project have not panned out. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.