

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 817-18(3): BENEFITS FROM INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

August 15, 2019

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I would like to ask the Minister of Infrastructure some questions regarding his statement earlier today. He noted that there are going to be specific requirements established for hiring and training local residents with regard to the Tlicho All-Season Road. This is something I have advocated for a long time, that we actually have specific targets and commitments and requirements built into large infrastructure projects. Can the Minister provide us some details of what these specific requirements are actually going to be? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not have that level of detail, of course, at my fingertips here on something like that, but this is something that the department took as an initiative under this P3 project, that we want to be able to capitalize as much as we can for northern opportunities for businesses and people in the region. I think our staff did a great job in implementing that, but I can certainly get all of the details and supply that to this House.

MR. O'REILLY: That is great to hear, that he is going to give it to the House, and I commend him for doing that. It's something I have advocated for a long time, and it could and should have happened with Stanton, as well. Is this a new policy, or is this a one-off?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: That is something I think that we are going to have a look at and evaluate as this project goes forward because this is a very unique project because the Tlicho government worked side by side with us to bring this project to fruition, and they were a big supporter of what we were doing. The federal government obviously supported the process that we are doing under the P3 concept that they had, that is now rolled up. However, we want to try this out, make the best benefits we can for the Tlicho residents and their businesses and see the opportunities and see how this works out, but that is not something I do not think is off the table for anything else.

MR. O'REILLY: I think we might have more discussion about whether this should be part of our policy coming forward. Later in the Minister's statement he sings the praises of P3s, and I would like to know: he talks about how the Mackenzie Valley fibre link is an effective way of delivering large strategic infrastructure projects that are essential for the NWT, so is there some sort of an evaluation framework or criteria for success for the Mackenzie Valley fibre link?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: The Mackenzie Valley fibre link is the very first one the Government of the Northwest Territories took on, and I think that, when you look at it and the challenges that were around that whole project, and I think the finance Minister will concur with me, it definitely buffers the Government of the Northwest Territories. P3s are on the back of industry going forward, and they face the challenges, and they

take the risks, and they do this, and it gives us some assurance to the Government of the Northwest Territories that, when we enter into these contracts, we are going to get what we paid for.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Thanks to the Minister for the talk about buffering. Let's talk about buffering of Internet services for the small communities where various Ministers promised that there was going to be enhanced Internet services for small communities. It just has not happened, so can the Minister tell me: what are the specific arrangements for Internet service improvement in the small communities that were promised as part of the Mackenzie Valley fibre link, and who's going to provide those services?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: As per the conversation yesterday with the Minister of Finance, he is in charge of the fibre line, but, as maybe the Member is not quite aware of, the table that I am responsible for with Minister Bains is that we have allocated money, or the federal government has allocated money through our discussions, to support rural communities with infrastructure to have Internet across Canada; 50 up, 10 down. That's the federal government's responsibility. They're working on that. They've allocated, I believe, some money to do that in the North in rural and remote communities. As the Finance Minister said yesterday, our responsibility is the line, and maybe bring it as far as the communities, particularly for our own use, but we are not in the business of supplying Internet. The Member didn't even like when we bought MTS, so we don't want to be an Internet provider. We'll let the private businesses handle that, but our table for sure with Minister Bains is well aware of this situation across Canada.

A lot of people don't even realize that a lot of rural and remote communities in northern provinces don't have any Internet, and the challenges that they have, similar to what Nunavut has. Every one of our communities does have Internet, but what we're trying to do as a table with the FPT table is bring 50 up, 10 down for everybody. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.