

Third Reading of Bills

BILL 61: APPROPRIATIONS ACT (INFRASTRUCTURE EXPENDITURES), 2020-2021

AUGUST 23, 2019

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I, too, will not be supporting this bill and the appropriation. We have had a great last day here, and I do appreciate the sentiments from everybody. We have accomplished a lot together, but I still need to do my job as an MLA.

In my view, the review of the capital budget was rushed. I wish that we had had more time to carefully consider it and go through it. I did note that there were, I think, opportunities for the Regular MLAs to get input into it, but that didn't happen. I would hope that that changes in the next Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

I know that this is the largest-ever infrastructure acquisition plan by our government, and I am all in favour of investment and creating jobs, but it is a matter of priorities, and sometimes our priorities differ. I guess that is why I have to get up and say this today, Mr. Speaker.

I am concerned about the potential to increase our debt as a government. As I said, I don't agree with some of the priorities set out in this budget. There is a very large portion of it, around 34 percent, that is dedicated to roads. Some of those are winter roads and so on, Mr. Speaker, but when I see a decline in spending or expenditures or money to the NWT Housing Corporation at the same time, I wonder about our priorities, Mr. Speaker.

There are a number of other issues, I believe, with the capital budget. The City of Yellowknife had requested assistance with a water line replacement. It asked for \$8 million. That support is not contained in the budget. I had hoped to see some progress with the Mackenzie Valley fibre link, to ensure that all of our communities are connected and that the promised benefits accrue to our communities down the valley, but that's not to be found in here. I question why there is no funding for visitors' services in three communities, Tuktoyaktuk, Whati, and Yellowknife. I think that there is a missed opportunity there.

Lastly, I am very concerned about some of the energy project investments in this capital budget. In particular, there is a replacement of the diesel plant in Lutselk'e. I just hope that that includes high-efficiency turbines or variable-speed turbines so that we get the best value for that. There is also a river, Snowdrift River, right next to the community that has, I think, great potential for mini hydro. I wonder whether the money spent on the diesel replacement might be better used for a mini hydro project in that community.

Then there is the Whati transmission line that I raised earlier today, Mr. Speaker. I am not convinced that there has been a thorough evaluation of all of the options for the Tlicho communities. Earlier today I tabled some information about the costs of mini hydro projects in three of the communities, and I wonder whether we are getting good

value for money and whether the money that might be spent on the Whati transmission line might actually fund mini hydro projects in three Tlichu communities, allow them to get off diesel, allow them to use electricity for home heating, commercial space heating, make a more significant reduction in greenhouse gas reductions, and lower the cost of living in those communities, all at a cheaper price than the Whati transmission line.

I challenge the Minister to make more information available about the options and make sure that the public understands what the real purpose of this project is, whether NICO is making a contribution, the NICO project by Fortune, whether they are making a financial contribution towards this line, and to really look at who benefits, as well.

For all of these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support the capital budget today. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.