

MEMBER'S STATEMENT — KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

MINERAL RESOURCES

March 13, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. The review of the Mineral Resources Act involved a four-and-a-half-hour clause-by-clause review and six hours in Committee of the Whole. To say it was contentious would be a huge understatement.

The Mineral Resources Act is not about promoting mining. It's about setting up a system for mineral rights management. The bill was supposed to be about trying to balance a complex set of rights and interests. Significant improvements included notice to Indigenous governments of mining claims and exploration work. There may be requirements for benefit agreements with Indigenous governments before a mine can go under production. Regular MLAs worked very hard to get some further improvements, but many were rejected.

The bill failed to recognize the legitimate interests of community governments in protecting their lands and infrastructure. There is no precision or clarity when it comes to public benefits, as there are no triggers or details on those benefits. The ill-defined zones are bad public policy and likely to create a race to the bottom, where different regions are incentivized to lower standards to try to attract investment.

There is virtually unfettered discretion for the Minister and Cabinet over the development of regulations. Regulations will cover very significant areas of public interest, including royalties, the definition of work to keep rights in good standing, map staking, and more.

There have been at least two public presentations on the next steps of the Mineral Resources Act; one of the Geoscience Forum in November of 2019 and another at an event sponsored by Alternatives North in late January 2020. Regular MLAs have yet to receive a briefing from the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment on this topic.

Clearly, there is a lot of work to be done to begin to implement to Mineral Resources Act. Ontario took about 10 years to fully implement its new legislation with a suite of regulations and policy. What I'm looking for from the Minister, and the public deserves, including the mining industry, is a clear plan. Everyone needs clear timelines and opportunities for public engagement in the development of numerous sets of regulations that will be required to implement the Mineral Resources Act. I'll have questions later today for the Premier on the next steps for the Mineral Resources Act. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.