

**KEVIN O'REILLY - MLA FRAME LAKE**  
**Committee of the Whole—2019-2020 Operating Budget Review**  
**Tourism - February 25 2020**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I'm looking at the second item on this page. Increase tourism in the NWT with a focus basically outside of Yellowknife. That's fine, but there are actually tourism needs in Yellowknife, and I would like to hear from the Premier how this government is going to support tourism in Yellowknife and around Yellowknife? Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Madam Premier.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. If I remember right, I think it was over 120,000 tourists came through Yellowknife in the last year. Correct, 120,000. I think it was around that. It was 110, I think, the year before that, so we're steadily increasing. Yellowknife doesn't need to have an influx in tourists. What we need in Yellowknife, and my personal opinion, is we need activities for tourists to take part in. That's the issue in Yellowknife. The smaller communities, like we've heard over and over, have no economy. Tourism is a viable economy to the smaller communities. Even though we've said that we're focusing on small communities, it doesn't mean we're neglecting Yellowknife. Yellowknife is happening. It's already there. It's pre-sustained. It's a matter of trying to get some of those tourism dollars into a small community so that they can make tourism a viable, economic diversification as well. It's not that we forget Yellowknife. We have to work with the private market in Yellowknife as well. Some of our things, there's all kinds of opportunities, but people need to take advantage of it. What we do need to focus on is getting the tourists into the smaller communities, and that's what I'd like to focus on in these four years, without forgetting Yellowknife as well. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Madam Premier. Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I am glad to hear that Yellowknife is not going to be completely ignored, because it is the gateway, even to get people into the smaller communities. As part of the packaging, the Premier talked about, take people for a trip out to Thaidene Nene. If it can be a winter location there, it would be a great little trip outside of Yellowknife.

We do have needs here. We don't have a proper visitors' centre. I had to drag the last ITI Minister through the basement of City Hall to see what's left here. That's not a proper visitor service centre for a capital city that can serve as a gateway to other places. That needs to be addressed. There's the issue around tourism regulation that's been in the news recently here about people not getting very good work experiences, and not getting paid and so on. That needs to be addressed in a more systematic fashion and to help promote places outside of Yellowknife. Presumably, these things are going to be addressed as well? Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Madam Premier.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Once we have done this mandate, and we've tabled the mandate, the next process is to actually come up with a budget to address some of these mandate things. Again, recognizing there's 22 priorities, we're not going to have a lot of money. We're not going to get everything done properly. We can either spread it out really thin or focus. I'm not sure where we're going to go with that yet. It's a debate that Cabinet will be having. Yellowknife's not going to get forgotten.

The Minister of ITI just brought up that they do get \$161,000 every year towards the visitor's information centre. They can use that as they wish. I can't promise there will be new money for the new centre in Yellowknife at this point because, like I said, we don't have a lot of money, and we have a huge amount of priorities, and you pick one. Universal childcare, the municipal funding gap; one of those alone has just taken out a whole mandate budget. We're in a position where we're struggling to get it done. What I can say, though, Madam Chair, is that businesses in Yellowknife need to also take a piece in this. When I was campaigning, I went to business -- I can't even remember. The Chamber of Commerce did a panel, and they were saying, "Where is our economy," et cetera, and I said, I think it was 100,000 people at that time, "A hundred thousand people come through Yellowknife. If every business built a little trinket, and they could sell one little trinket for \$1 to every tourist, that's \$100,000 in your business." The reality is that tourists don't come with just \$1 in their pocket. Tourists come with thousands of dollars in their pocket, and they are walking around our streets of Yellowknife looking for things to do.

To anyone who is hearing, this is something we have to keep saying to the public and to the private enterprises, is that there is money there. Start taking advantage of it, looking for things to do, because there is a need, there is a niche, and we have a huge opportunity we're not taking enough advantage of. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Madam Premier. Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I don't want to prolong this, but I guess I had hoped to see something about developing partnerships even within Yellowknife as part of the mandate. The city has the opportunity to develop a hotel levee; they haven't taken that up. I recognize that, but there could be work with Indigenous governments here in Yellowknife. There is federal money available for cultural centres, as well. I think you can be creative. If ITI can find ways to help with these kinds of partnerships, that would be great, but we do need proper visitor services in Yellowknife to make sure that people can get out to other places, as well, even if it's part of a strategy of increasing tourism outside Yellowknife.

The last thing, I guess, I'm going to say is that I went to Iceland in 2015. It's a country of 300,000 people. They get 3 million tourists a year. Everywhere you go, there's a package, and in many places, more than one that you can do. I agree with the Premier; that's what we need to develop here, is options and packages for people to do when they get here, so that there are things for them to do and they're not necessarily tied to one operator when they get here, either.

I think there are lots of opportunities to help the tourism in Yellowknife, and I'd like to make sure that the department is going to be pursuing some of those, in partnership with Indigenous governments locally and the city of Yellowknife. Thanks, Madam Chair. That's all I have.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Madam Premier.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, my direction would be for the Minister of ITI, and all Ministers, to work with all applicable stakeholders. That would include in our capital city; it would include the City of Yellowknife and our Indigenous governments that are located within our capital, or a proximity within our capital. Thank you, Madam Chair.