

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 252-19(2): Remediation of Mining Sites

May 28, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Premier, who is responsible for federal relations. My statement earlier today outlined how the federal government has made very substantial investments, hundreds of millions of dollars, in Western Canadian provinces to support the energy sector by expediting well site remediation. Has the Premier considered similar assistance to the NWT to accelerate action on our extensive contaminated-sites inventory? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Honourable Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, the remediation from mine sites has always been a priority. I take ownership for some of that. Just recently, a drill was returned to my brother that was left from my father. My father has been gone for over a decade, but, in the 1960s, the mining and the drilling here was not okay. They were dumping things all over the place. There are huge issues within the territories, and there is a huge economic opportunity to clean that up. It wasn't based on rudeness; it was based on ignorance. They did not know better back in the day. Mining is different. My Minister of ITI, as well, has been on this. That is not only her portfolio. It is her background. She also is well aware of the economic opportunities and the issues we face within that.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Premier for that. I think there are hundreds of millions of dollars at stake here and that, if we made the right pitch to the federal government, we could tap into that. Can the Premier tell us what specific work has been done to pursue this opportunity to drive economic recovery in the NWT through this strong federal investment in contaminated-site remediation here?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: On our side, with EIA, our officials have had discussions with officials before COVID-19, in all honesty, on a regular basis. I also know that my Minister of ITI is also right now working on a pan-northern letter to the federal government, to Minister O'Regan, actually, with CanNor to actually advocate for that funding.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. It's good to hear. She might have anticipated the next question, so I'm just going to change it up a bit. Earlier today, I had mentioned that there are opportunities where we could perhaps work with our neighbours in Yukon and Nunavut on the dedicated accelerated Northern Contaminated Sites initiative. Sounds like some of that work may be underway. Can the Premier tell us specifically what she has done? I understand it might be a letter. Can she give us a copy of that letter when it's done and keep reporting back to us about progress on this initiative?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: There are two things. One, of course, I just checked with my Minister of ITI. Absolutely, she will give you a copy of the letter that she is writing on behalf of it. The other thing I want to speak about wasn't really asked, but I'm going to go there, is that every week since the beginning of March we have been meeting with the Prime Minister. We've been talking at our what is called FMM, First Ministers' Meetings. We've been talking about COVID-19. The last meeting we had, the council, the federation, the premiers across Canada decided that we were, and we told the Prime Minister, that from now on we are going to have one-week talks about COVID-19. One week goes back to our normal needs that we have longstanding. This will be something that I'll carry forward, as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Premier. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'RELLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. That is all good news from the Premier. I want to thank her for that. Just as the federal government is using this funding as leverage to get Alberta to commit to better management of resource extraction to prevent these sorts of things from happening, we haven't gone there. Five years after devolution, we've made no changes to our legislation or at least even brought them into force to make sure this doesn't happen again, and again, and again. Strategic Oil & Gas, we're going to inherit the site Cantung, it goes on and on. I want a commitment from this Premier that she's going to fix this issue and problem so that, when the feds say, "What are you doing about it," we can actually say that we are actually on it, finally.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I do like to work with the Members. However, I would have to look into that. I can't make a commitment on the floor that I'll fix that in this Assembly. I have to look at what the legislation is and what we have going on. I will make a commitment that I will look into it, and I'll get back to the Member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.