

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

### **INTERNET CONNECTIVITY**

**May 29, 2020**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. This is a statement I made in the House in August 2019, and it rings even truer today as we have all seen the limitations and shortcomings with Internet connectivity during the pandemic. Today, a fibre optic line runs from Alberta to Inuvik. The project, completed in 2017, cost about \$95 million and \$3 million to operate each year. That fibre link was funded on the understanding that benefits would be shared down the Mackenzie Valley.

Let's go back to the record, Mr. Speaker. As early as 2011, the then Minister of Health was promoting "a very ambitious plan...that would provide a fibre optic link to all the communities...there would be cell phone, Internet, TV, all those systems in the community." When the budget proposal was reviewed in 2015, the Finance Minister was asked if the proposal was "getting a fibre optic link right to the homes." He said, "The intention is to have a clear point of presence in all the communities." The March 2017 news release announcing completion of the line said that the residents and businesses would now have a hook-up point "located in Fort Simpson, Wrigley, Tulita, Norman Wells, Fort Good Hope, Inuvik, and in High Level." This Finance Minister's September 2017 statement in this House said, "The completion of the nearly 1,200 kilometre fibre link brings affordable, high-speed, telecommunications to six communities along the Mackenzie Valley, including Inuvik." I'm sorry, that was the last Finance Minister.

Unfortunately, for communities along this route, none of the magical promises have come true. The fibre line hook-up point is not in all the communities. For Fort Simpson, Wrigley, Tulita, Norman Wells, and Fort Good Hope, the fibre line runs past the communities. As I understand it, it will cost \$1 million plus to run the line into these communities. Without that money, the line might as well not be there at all.

This is serious. The Members of this House approved millions of dollars in expenditures of public funds because the government promised the project would deliver services in these communities, not pass by them. The justification of improved Internet service for these communities was repeatedly used in approving these expenditures. At the same time, numerous predictions were also made of new large revenue streams to help offset the costs of the project. Mr. Speaker, I see unanimous consent to conclude my statement?

---Unanimous consent granted

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. Later today, I will have questions for the Minister of Finance as to why the anticipated improvements to community Internet services along the fibre link have yet to happen and how we are going to improve Internet access and reliability in all NWT communities. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.