

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 302-19(2): Pan-Territorial Travel Zone

June 4, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. Early in this sitting, I raised the issue of a pan-territorial travel zone with the Premier. Today, on CBC, it was reported that the Nunavut Health Minister, along with the Chief Public Health Officer in Nunavut, announced that there is going to be a travel bubble between the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. We had the Minister of Health on the floor of this House today say that there is not going to be a bubble with the Yukon, because they're going to open up with BC. I would like to ask the Premier: what's going on with all of this, and why are we finding out about this in the media and on the floor of the House, instead of being informed as Regular MLAs, about this pan-territorial travel zone? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were negotiations going on. There weren't negotiations; there were talks going on. That is the problem with having different tables, Mr. Speaker. I was talking. I brought it forth to the Premiers at our northern Premier meeting. In reality, I hadn't yet spoken to our Chief Public Health Officer. The Chief Public Health Officer has the whole authority over the borders. I'm clear with that; it can't be fettered. I thought we'd start this discussion just by bringing to the Premiers, and then I would bring it to the Chief Public Health Officer. At the same time, though, unknown to me, Mr. Speaker, the Chief Public Health Officers were also meeting with the three territories because someone else, I guess, had put it in their head. The decisions had been made through the Chief Public Health Officers, but in honesty, Mr. Speaker, Premiers have just found out today. I just found out, as well. My staff are working on an emergency call with the northern Premiers right now to discuss it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I am sorry that I had to put the Premier on the hot spot, but when I am finding out these things on the floor of the House and in the media, there is a lot of public interest in this. Can the Premier, then, explain what is going on? Is there a travel bubble now with Nunavut, and what is the situation with Yukon?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Again, I am just actually finding out myself what's going on with it. The Chief Public Health Officers have been working closely together. It is the Premiers who have to have those discussions. We only meet once a week, and sometimes, that doesn't work with the Chief Public Health Officers' meetings. We had negotiations or talks at the table to see if there was interest. There was interest in all three. Since we had that first discussion, though, Mr. Speaker, there was a new revelation that Yukon -- as we were talking about three territories, all three territories had locked down borders, and then the Yukon actually announced that they are now having to deal with the BC government, which put a different spin on it. Those are

discussions we still have to have as Premiers, although recognizing it is the Chief Public Health Officer's authority. I can't remember the rest of the question, so I will sit down.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Premier for that. It sounded a lot like her response to the first question I had. I guess what I want to know clearly from the Premier is: is there a travel bubble through the public health order process between Nunavut and Northwest Territories, and what is the situation with Yukon?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: My understanding from the Chief Public Health Officer report is that it will be with Nunavut. It's not with the Yukon at this time. There will be an announcement next week on it. However, the opening of the borders actually will take a little bit more work. It's not something that you can just do in one day. There will be background work that needs to be done to open up those borders.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. I want to thank the Premier for that. What I would like to seek now is a commitment from the Premier that she is going to provide us with an update following her emergency meeting with the other two Premiers that she says she is going to have this evening. Look, I understand that the Chief Public Health Officers are independent. That is what we want; we want them independent of everybody, including Cabinet, quite frankly, during a pandemic and an emergency. I would like to seek a commitment from the Premier that she will provide an update to us as Regular MLAs, perhaps later this evening after she has had a chance to chat with her colleagues on either side of our border. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: There are a couple of issues. I will provide the MLAs an update, but I can't commit to it being this evening. Two issues, Mr. Speaker: one is that my staff are still trying to arrange that emergency meeting. I'm not sure if the Premiers are just finding out because of this meeting here. The other thing, Mr. Speaker, I'm going through some family stuff, serious family stuff at this point, so I will not commit. I need to have a day off after I have this meeting to deal with my family issues, and I will deal with you tomorrow. Serious family issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.