

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

Northern Benefits from Slave Geological Province Road

June 11, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. On March 16th, I presented written questions to the Minister of Infrastructure on GNWT contracts for the Slave Geological Province road. The Minister tabled the response on May 26th. The results were shocking in terms of the failure to deliver northern benefits. The information tabled by the Minister shows that, for the contracts issued from September 1, 2015, to date: only four of the 14 contracts went to northern contractors; only three of the successful contractors were Business Incentive Policy registered; only nine percent of the contracted amounts went to northern companies, \$88,660 out of \$987,282; and the pattern continues under the current Minister as all three contracts issued in 2020 went to southern companies.

These results are even worse than predicted in a March 2019 Economic Study of the Slave Geological Province Road by a consultant hired by the Department of Infrastructure. That consultant predicted "based on historical evidence" that "engineering and professional services related to the road pre-construction work will import 66 percent of its labour." According to that study, at no point in this project, from planning right through to potential mine operations, will northern labour ever exceed 50 percent.

The Minister of Finance said the following in this House on March 26th while defending the Slave Geological Province road: "We all arrived here on a mission of change, and we all arrived here on a mission of doing things differently and better. That means keeping resource dollars in the North. That means keeping the spending on projects in the North. That means engaging local industries. That will be up to all of us, and it will be up to this Cabinet to do that and to deliver on that promise."

Earlier this week, we approved the largest supplementary appropriation in the history of the Northwest Territories. Over 40 percent of the \$162 million amount in that spending is for infrastructure projects carried over from the previous year. This is proof that large infrastructure projects are not going to be the foundation for economic recovery. We can't get the money out the door, Mr. Speaker, and when we do, the benefits to Northerners rarely live up to the promises. We need to start small, spend money on people and our needs, such as housing, food security, and renewable energy. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.