

## ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

### QUESTION 505-19(2): HOME INSURANCE

February 5, 2021

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Finance, who is responsible for the regulation of the insurance industry in the Northwest Territories. Section 270 of the Insurance Act requires that the superintendent of insurance prepare an annual report for the Minister. The last report available on the Department of Finance website is from 2013, seven years ago. Can the Minister tell us whether annual reports have been prepared since 2013 and why they have not been made public? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister of Finance.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have to look back to 2013, which is certainly long before my time, to speak to what may have happened in the entire course of that period. I can say that, with respect to the provisions where it says that the Minister may direct that the annual report be printed and published, prior to my opportunity to have this role, I can't speak to what may or may not have been directed. I can say that it is my intention to direct that that happen in the future. Thank you.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I thank the Minister for her commitment to get on that right away, that legal requirement. It's not clear to me that we take the regulation of the insurance industry very seriously when annual reports are not made public and the amount of information is very limited on the website. Can the Minister tell us what steps this government is taking to ensure that homeowners, school boards, and businesses can actually access affordable insurance?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Just to be clear, the role of the department and the role, more specifically, of the superintendent of insurance certainly is to regulate, but it is not something that can get involved in the private market. The insurance superintendent doesn't change the market prices, doesn't influence in the market; they regulate the market. I would say it's not necessarily fair to suggest that we are not taking that seriously. I would also be cautious that the problems and challenges being faced by homeowners, school boards, and businesses may well be different. I certainly agree, and the department is aware that we want to be conscious of those challenges, but we want to make sure that we are looking at the nature of the problem in each of those circumstances to truly understand what is at issue and not to try to put ourselves into a situation that is not ours to solve or one that we can solve.

I would note further one last comment, Mr. Speaker. It is possible to issue a complaint to the Office of the Superintendent of Insurance, which is something that certainly policyowners can consider doing if they are unable to resolve their matter with their insurance themselves.

**MR. O'REILLY:** That's great to get that from the Minister, but clearly there has been a

failure of the private market. People can't get insurance, can't get affordable insurance. We're just going to stand there and watch? This government proclaims that homeownership is a critical part of addressing homelessness, yet residents can't find or obtain affordable insurance. We heard the Minister of housing earlier today talk about how they have to change programs because people can't get home insurance. What specifically has the Minister done to ensure that home insurance is not a barrier to homeownership?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Again, the superintendent of insurance, their role is to ensure that the regulations are being followed, not to go in and create an insurance industry run or administered by a Crown corporation or otherwise by the Government of the Northwest Territories. My colleague already, from the Housing Corporation, has described the efforts that they are using to try to ensure that this is not a barrier. My colleague over at ECE is certainly working with school boards to ensure that, again, they are not facing barriers. There is certainly a lot of work happening in the departments that are relevant to the areas where people may be facing challenges for insurance. Aside from that, we are going to continue to ensure that the regulation is happening and that those reports are published, and that is the role that we have at the Department of Finance.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary. Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. I appreciate the response. I want to thank the Minister for that, but I don't think it's good enough for us to just say that there's a problem. I've got a solution. I've pitched it before, so I'll try it again. In my Member's statement, I discussed how the Saskatchewan government, in 1944, set up its own Crown corporation to provide insurance because the private sector could not or would not provide coverage. That corporation now operates in five provinces to provide the kind of coverage that our residents need. Will the Minister commit to having discussions with the Saskatchewan Government Insurance Corporation about potential coverage in the NWT, and will she share the outcome of those discussions with us publicly? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Again, I just want to ensure that we are looking at what the actual problem is and where the right solutions are, whether they are in the Housing Corporation, whether it's with ECE, or whether, in fact, it's with the superintendent of insurance with the Department of Finance. That said, with respect to solution-oriented approaches and talking about different ways of governments doing things, yes, I have no difficulty in saying that the Department of Finance can reach out to the Saskatchewan Government Insurance Program, investigate it, and see whether or not that's a tool that would benefit people in the Northwest Territories and the industry in the Northwest Territories. I will make that outreach and I will certainly bring those discussions and information back. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.