

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 622-19(2): GAHCHO KUE MINE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

March 2, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission. We've had a recent outbreak of COVID-19 at the Gahcho Kue Mine site; 19 confirmed cases, 11 of which are workers from out of the territory, but eight of them are NWT residents. My question for the Minister is: what is he doing to protect northern workers at this mine site? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. WSCC is in constant contact with the line manager to ensure all reporting requirements under the line health and safety regulations have been followed. I was very happy to tell the Members and the public that WSCC has gone in on February 26th to 28th, and part of the on-site investigation is to ensure that their control plan, which is reviewed by both WSCC and the CPHO, has remained in place and was adhered to. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister. It's good to hear that inspectors have finally been sent to the mine site. Can the Minister tell me whether there're any WSCC requirements or the control plan requires separation of northern and southern workers in terms of their accommodation at the site?

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: WSCC does not have authority under the Mine Health and Safety Act to dedicate the segregation of the two, north and southern workers. If it's an identified component of the control plan, the WSCC will enforce to adhere to this.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that, but it didn't really answer my question. There seems to be some kind of top secret exposure control plan that he can't even share any information with me on the floor of this House. I've asked about whether northern and southern workers are separated at the worksite. He can't tell me that. Now, I'll try something else. Can the Minister tell me whether this top secret control plan requires masking of employees at the site?

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: I understand the Member is trying to get information. First and foremost, this is the plan of a private industry of private company, so we need to respect that. It's their plan. In regards to his question, the Mine Health and Safety Regulations do not govern the use of face masks, and the WSCC is unable to enforce the usage. If the masks are included in the employees' control plan, the WSCC would enforce compliance to the plan. If it's in the plan, we make sure it's enforced.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. We have a top secret plan. You can't even tell me whether masking's required at the site. I'll try something else here, Mr. Speaker. Can he tell me if there's any requirements for cleaning of the shared washrooms at the site? That's a pretty simple thing to ask, Mr. Speaker. I hope he can at least answer that. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: It is not top secret. It's a business. It's the company's control plan, and we need to respect that. We work with them through WSCC. Under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, washroom hygiene is addressed for non-pandemic situations. Changes as a result of outbreak are not covered under these regulations. The WSCC can enforce compliance if increased cleaning practises were identified in employer's control plan. Mr. Speaker, the Member needs to understand, if it's in the plan, we enforce it. If it's not in the plan, then that's where we can't enforce something that's not in the plan, which has been approved by WSCC and the Chief Public Health Officer. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.