

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 720-19(2): AIRPORT TAXI FEES

May 28, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. Yellowknife taxi companies are looking for relief from airport taxi stand licence fees to get through the hard times.

Can the Minister tell us what analysis, if any, was done on passenger traffic volumes before the decision was made to rescind the waiver on these fees as of January 1st, 2021. Merci, Mr. Speaker,.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister responsible for Infrastructure.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Yellowknife airport continues to collect and maintain passenger traffic volumes on a monthly basis. The Yellowknife airport terminal passenger traffic is already seeing an increase over the year. Total passengers for the movement for the period of April 2021 for the air terminal building has increased 237 percent over the past year. The total number of aircraft movements for the fiscal 2020 2021 has increased 60 percent over last April. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. That's great to hear the passenger traffic is increasing, but I didn't actually get a response to my question, as usual, Mr. Minister [sic]. I asked for what kind of analysis was done before the waivers were rescinded as of January 1st. But while these fees are significant for taxi drivers and their companies, I'm not sure that they're a vital revenue source for this Government. Can the Minister tell us how many dollars were collected by charging the airport taxi stand licence fees at the Yellowknife airport and at all airports across the NWT in the last year and then the year before the pandemic. And I gave the Minister these questions before we got into the House today. Merci.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The annual rate for a taxi stand licence is \$15,000, and it's payable in monthly installments of 1,250. There are currently three taxi operators at the Yellowknife airport making a total annual payment of \$45,000. The taxi stand licence fees has not seen an increase since 2019. There are no other airports currently charging fees for taxi to be able to operate at the airports. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that information. It's interesting that these fees were only charged in Yellowknife, and it's only \$45,000. I don't know why we can't do something about this. But, of course, we all

look forward to the day when the pandemic restrictions are lifted and that we can get tourism going again. But if we don't have a taxi industry, how are they going to be able to serve the tourists that arrive here. So will the Minister give that service sector the relief that it needs now and reinstitute the waiver on or at least prorated the taxi stand licence fees until we see the return of carriers and revival of passenger numbers to pre-pandemic levels? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the economic stimulus measures were initially introduced at the onset of COVID as a means to support small and local businesses. The relief was in place since April 1st, 2020, until December 31st, 2020. I appreciate the Member providing me with his questions this morning, and I will review with the taxi licensing fees, and provide a written response to the Member within two weeks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Monsieur le President. Now, I'm getting somewhere. This is great. No, seriously, though, I do appreciate that the Minister's willing to review the situation and she's going to get back to me in writing. So I appreciate that very much.

When I had an earlier exchange with her on this issue and I was told that, quote, from the Minister, "The YZF regional airport manager is continuing discussions in an effort to find a solution to alleviate the apparent challenge with these lease payments", that's great. But I'm not sure what else we can do besides prorated or reduce the fees. But can the Minister tell us what other measures or supports might be provided in addition to the continued airport taxi stand licence fees. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are seeing, like I mentioned, an increase in air passenger traffic at the Yellowknife airport. I understand that the Federal Government has introduced various target programs for businesses that are impacted by COVID 19, which may be able to provide some support. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.