

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

GNWT-NWT CHAMBER OF MINES WORKING GROUP

June 3, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. On March 4th, 2021 during the review of the ITI main estimates, I asked questions about the core funding received by the NWT and Nunavut Chamber of Mines. The ITI deputy minister said “we meet with the chamber every two weeks in a working group. We are working on our competitiveness. We are looking at actions. They are contributing to the critical metals action plan. There is a lot of good work.”

This got me thinking. What could the chamber of mines and ITI senior staff possibly be talking about that requires meetings every couple of weeks? I'm not aware of any other economic sector that has that kind of privileged access to this department. So I filed an Access to Information request to find out what was happening.

What I got back appears to be an incomplete set of GNWT-chamber of mines COVID-19 recovery working group meeting summaries with numerous redactions that I tabled in the House yesterday. I encourage all of my colleagues, the media, and the public to review these meeting summaries. What was supposed to be a working group focused on economic recovery from the impacts of the COVID pandemic has transitioned into a high-level bimonthly lobbying campaign behind closed doors.

Notes reveal ITI taking actions well beyond economic recovery, or COVID. The economic and financial interests of the mining industry appear to be driving actions by ITI. Regular MLAs don't get this kind of access.

Working group members have been reviewing and editing ministerial correspondence, including letters to co-management boards, reviewing and changing work contracted through public procurement processes, and pushing for land withdrawals that support land rights' negotiations to be lifted or stopped. Political advice in dealing with the federal government is freely shared and exchanged. Efforts are being coordinated on a federal minerals plan with GNWT pushing to have diamonds and arsenic considered critical. Nothing seems to be off limits in these lobbying meetings.

This is not about whether mining is good or criticism of the chamber of mines. The chamber does a very good job representing its interest. However, these interests are not the same as the public interest. This is about the appropriateness of these meetings, held behind closed doors, that have expanded well beyond economic recovery. I will have questions later today for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.