

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

ORAL QUESTION 756-19(2)/ 765-19(2):

GNWT– NWT & NUNAVUT CHAMBER OF MINES WORKING GROUP

June 3, 2021

ORAL QUESTION 756-19(2)

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My question is for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment.

Yesterday, I tabled meeting summaries from the GNWT-chamber of mines COVID-19 recovery working group. Can the Minister tell us whether she was aware of and authorized the full scope of discussions being held between senior ITI officials and the chamber of mines throughout these meetings. Mahsi, Mr.Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER; Thank you, Member for FrameLake. Minister responsible for Industry, Tourism and Investment.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK; Thank you, Mr.Speaker. Mr.Speaker, this group was stood up, if you can think back now a long 12 months back to June, when we were still just fresh coming out of the lockdown and we were still a long way from having the Business Advisory Council or Emerging Stronger or any other type of document, when the Department of ITI then reached out to the industry representatives that represent almost a third of our GDP to start to talk about COVID recovery, COVID relief, and, really, economic recovery and economic relief more generally. So I can't take credit for the decision to get that going at that time and to get that work moving, but I've certainly have been aware that that working group exists. And I have often asked, you know, what the reaction of the group has been and what work they're at. I have certainly received briefing notes, which I think were included in this some-hundred page document that I received yesterday. And, again, you know, certainly well aware that that work is ongoing and intended to look at where industry and private industry can come together with government to find overlap to discuss efforts for economic recovery and regrowth of the mineral resource sector in keeping with the mandate of this government. Thank you, Mr.Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. The records of these meetings show that the chamber, and even ITI staff, are been pushing to stop or remove land withdrawals, most of which support good faith negotiations of Indigenous land rights. Can the Minister explain why her department is pushing to stop or remove land withdrawals in light of Cabinet's commitments and mandate to settle and implement Indigenous rights? Mahsi, Mr.Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK; Thank you, Mr.Speaker. Mr.Speaker, no one department has a position or an opinion about land withdrawals. There is a position of the Government of the Northwest Territories on land withdrawals, and that alone is the position, not one ofts or, you know, statements made out of context, perhaps in these

notes. Although on that note, Mr. Speaker, I received this only yesterday. I have also gone through it. I've gone through the unredacted version. Mr. Speaker, it is clear to me-- and it shouldn't be any surprise-- industry, indeed municipalities, have long said that the lack of certainty around land is a real barrier in the Northwest Territories. And it should be no surprise that resolving the land claims and moving those negotiations forward is a mandate of this government for a very good reason. There's nothing new there. That is very clear to every department, and it's clear to the Department of ITI. It is also not a surprise that industry continues to ask what is being done on that and they advocate for a solution to that challenge, but the solution is going to be a whole-of-government one. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. She may need to discuss this matter further with her staff.

But the summary seemed to indicate that the chamber of mines is having direct input into ministerial correspondence and changing the work done by a consultant hired through a public procurement process. Can the Minister tell us how much access the chamber of mines has been given to ministerial correspondence and the draft work of publically hired and funded consultants. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK; Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's no impropriety in the sharing of information that-- again, I've reviewed both of the redacted and unredacted versions and I spoke to the department. And it's very clear that when there's correspondence going between levels of government, between governments, between government officials, while we may well want to share the efforts and the work that we are doing, for example in a remediation economy, a number of letters were I believe tabled here in the House in order to put forward the kind of advocacy that is happening between governments. That correspondence and that sharing is just that, it's sharing. They're certainly not going to be editing any materials. Or if they are writing, if industry is writing on their own lobbying efforts, it may well be to their benefit to share that with the government. And that's a benefit of having working groups like this, whether it's in the mineral resource sector, the fisheries sector, in the remediation economy, that is the kind of work ITI does, and it's the same level of access that's being provided here.

With respect to the work of consultants, I think I have a hunch as to what exactly the Member is speaking to. You know, and, again, at this point, it's-- I suspect, Mr. Speaker, although I haven't had an opportunity to speak to the Member about this document that was tabled, there is a study that was commissioned. It involved all three territories and CanNor around how to increase investment in the Northwest Territories in the mineral resources sector. And that work indeed did look at the position of the chamber of mines, because they represent the industry that we are trying to increase investment in accordance with the mandate.

I'm happy to speak to the Member further about that work, but where it's at, it is progressing. Again, it's tri-territorial, Mr. Speaker. And as tri-territorial but knowing that we are looking to increase investment in private sector. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER; Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary. Member for FrameLake.

MR. O'REILLY; Merci, Monsieur le President. Thanks to the Minister for that response. Now that this information on these meetings has been made public, the Minister has several options as I see it, and they are not mutually exclusive. She could stop these meetings, confine them to their original and stated purpose of economic recovery, allow other interested parties to observe and/or participate, make complete summaries of these lobbying meetings public, and afford other economic sectors and nongovernmental organizations the same opportunity for consultation and lobbying.

What, if anything, is the Minister prepared to do about these GNWT-chamber of mines COVID-19 recovery working group meetings that have moved well beyond their original purpose? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK; Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think as I said at the beginning, this is an industry that contributes one third of the GDP of the Northwest Territories, over 1300 direct jobs in 2019, not to mention indirect jobs, over \$813 million is spent in procurement. That's supporting all the other industries. If the Department of ITI wasn't having regular meetings with the industry representation, I would be facing very difficult questions in the House to explain why we aren't. There are regular working group meetings with the fisheries sector right now. I have regular meetings with Northwest Territories tourism, as is the department working often very closely with them.

So the list of options that the Member has proposed, I have not seen. I don't have it in front of me. But every industry should have access to the Department of ITI. That is exactly the role of ITI, and certainly the sector that is the size of the mineral resource sector should have a role with the Department of ITI. It should always be focused on the well-being of the Northwest Territories, on the economy of the well-being-- the well-being of the economy of the Northwest Territories, and always in keeping that there is work that can be done in the private sector and work that must be done in the public sector. And where we can find common ground we move forward and where we cannot, so be it, both parties still need to advance, because, again, I think at the end of the day, we're all working for the same thing, which is really the growth of the Northwest Territories and our betterment of our economy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question 765-19(2):

MR. O'REILLY; Merci, Monsieur le President. I have further questions for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment on the GNWT-Chamber of mines COVID-19 working group. Can the Minister tell us whether there's a terms of reference for this group and if so, could she table that in the House tomorrow? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER; Thank you, Member for FrameLake. Minister responsible for Industry, Tourism and Investment.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK; Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I believe there is-- certainly there's some parameters around what the goals of the group would be, and

I will make sure that we have something that I can bring forward to explain the goal and intent of the group. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I thank the Minister for that and I look forward to the information being tabled in the House tomorrow. But I can tell the Minister I've reviewed the meeting summaries very closely, and there's things being discussed in there, including a workshop on the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, the geoscience forum, the Fraser Institute rankings of jurisdictions, the Chamber of mines-City of Yellowknife Memorandum of Understanding, and many more items. So can the Minister tell me how these matters relate to economic recovery for the mining sector? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK; Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I managed to write down two of the items that were listed. With respect to the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board workshop, there was a workshop that was held; I believe it was hosted by the land and water boards and it was attended by, if I recall correctly, a hundred or a 150 different representatives from governments, from industry, so, you know, I am not particularly surprised that they'd be talking about that since both parties would have been in attendance at that.

With respect to the Fraser Institute, that's an annual report that's put out. Some say, you know, again, say what you will about whether or not it is an accurate representation of our industry or perhaps we're doing better than they're saying that they are. The point is, it's an industry publication that is looked at by the industry. And, again, in general, we haven't always done or fared as well as I would like to see us do. Again, not surprising that we would want to look to the members of the industry who respond to that and say 'what can we do to be better' so that we can rank more highly. And, again, Mr. Speaker, there was a number of items listed there. The point of these meetings, at the core, was to find areas of common ground. They are not entirely overlapping. There are going to be things that the chamber of mines raises that the government can say, thank you, we will take that away. And there are going to be items that may be an interest to the government to pursue that the chamber of mines say, go ahead, do as you will. But that is the nature of tension between industry organizations and government that exists, whether I'm in the tourism sector, the agriculture sector, the fisheries sector, the film sector. It's a healthy tension, and it has to be there. So we should always, in my view, be having these conversations with the industry that we represent or that we work for, to grow the economy. We are not run by them but the conversations need to be had.

So I'm happy to go through the other items on that list and ensure that in fact the conversations are clear, that the-- you know, the position of the government is made clear and, you know, can do that, whether that's one by one now or whether that's later with the Member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that commitment to ensure that the scope of these meetings is confined to its original purpose. It appears as though, and I want to draw the attention of the Minister to one particular meeting that was held on November the 4th, 2020, and there was a discussion there of the mineral ten-year relief package. And that certainly does have something to do with economic recovery. Information, though, shared appears to have

included considerations and the decisions made by the Financial Management Board and Cabinet. Regular MLAs, we were not provided an opportunity for input into the relief package. Can the Minister explain whether the chamber of mines was provided with information on how the FMB and/or Cabinet made its decisions on this relief and how that relates to Cabinet confidence? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK; Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have only scanned notes in front of me, but I am confident that nothing that is confidential would have been shared. The meeting minutes simply are indicating that, in fact, although there were ongoing requests as to whether or not the mineral relief would be extended, this is of course just several months in, wondering what would be happening for the next year, the statement simply is that it has to go through Cabinet and FMB before such a decision is made. That is an appropriate response. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER; Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary. Member for FrameLake.

MR. O'REILLY; Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that response. I'm not aware of any other economic sector or nongovernmental organization that has been able to have twice monthly meetings with senior officials for over a year with so little transparency without other stakeholders or interests at the table. Can the Minister tell us whether any other economic sector or nongovernmental organizations have bimonthly lobbying meetings without any public scrutiny or other stakeholders at the table with her department? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK; Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the business advisory council certainly, once they got going, were meeting very regularly; I think at one point weekly with representatives of the Department of ITI. But before the BAC, or the Business Advisory Council even existed, this group was put together as a working group to start to talk about economic recovery at the tail end of the closure-- there was skill Ekati I think was still closed at the time. It was clear that there was going to be a tremendous weak economic recovery. There was great fear and uncertainty and so this group came together and said what can we start to do right now, and they've continued to have regular meetings.

As far as others, and setting the Business Advisory Council for the moment, I believe there are regular, if not weekly or biweekly meetings with NWT tourism. That is another major sector that we have regular meetings with. And it's actually been my request that we start to have more regular meetings with the representatives of the fisheries sector given the momentum that's behind the revitalization of the fishing industry.

So, you know, again, Mr. Speaker, this is a sector that represents a third of our GDP. They are certainly spending more time at developing a recovery plan because of the impact that it has on the economy but that is by no means exclusive, and it certainly would be my hope that as we make the decisions about economic growth and about economic recovery, we are doing so in a way that is responsive to what is happening on the ground in the industry and in the business community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER; Thank you, Minister. Colleagues, our time for oral questions has expired. Written questions. Returns for written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's

address. Petitions. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Tabling of documents. Minister responsible for the Status of Women.