

## 15<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly

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### **Observations on the Northern Mining Industry**

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to recognize that it's Mining Week here in Yellowknife. This is an annual event put on by the NWT and Nunavut Chamber of Mines as a way of paying tribute to the industry and developing awareness amongst the public.

Mr. Speaker, I can't make a statement on mining today without mentioning the labour dispute at Ekati and I do hope, Mr. Speaker, that both sides can negotiate an end to the impasse, as many of our residents are being negatively impacted because of this situation.

Mr. Speaker, mining is and has been for many years the number one industry in the North. It is certainly the reason why Yellowknife has grown to where it is today. The mining sector currently represents about half of the NWT's gross domestic product and over the past 10 years has brought unprecedented private capital investment into the North.

Currently there are three operating mines in the NWT: Ekati, Diavik and CanTung. Between all three of these mines they employ approximately 2,500 people. Many secondary industries have emerged over the years to support the business of mining, and certainly booms in the construction industry can be attributed directly to this sector. The local aviation industry attributes about 60 percent of its business to the mining and exploration industry.

My point, Mr. Speaker, is that many people in the Northwest Territories have and are continuing to benefit from the business of mining. But while things may be looking good for this sector, its necessary predecessor, exploration, has been suffering for the last several years. Exploration companies can't get permits to do even basic low-level exploration. The problem, Mr. Speaker, is slow progress on land claims, particularly in the Deh Cho and Akaitcho territory. The impasse in this area is stifling grassroots exploration efforts. This, Mr. Speaker, should also be a concern of this government.

Ekati and Diavik estimated 17 to 21 years of mine life, respectively. We're already eight years down the road with Ekati. CanTung's tungsten reserves are very short, and none of this compares to the 60-year mine life we saw with the Con and Giant mines.

Under the current regulatory process it takes 10 years to licence a mine, so it's pretty clear that if exploration companies aren't out there now looking for new resources and sources of minerals, in 10 years or so the NWT economy will be in a major downturn, Mr. Speaker.

In addition, it should be a concern that we now have a mining economy focused almost solely on one commodity: diamonds. In order for the mining industry to become more diversified it needs other commodities on the shelf. Luckily the NWT has these. We have gold, silver, zinc, copper and rare earth metals that are all trading at record highs. In most of them, our forecasts remain high in light of the increased demand from Asia's growing economy.

We also have a major storehouse of clean energy: uranium. In order to bring these commodities into production some day, prospectors need access to the land to carry out the grassroots exploration activities. Unfortunately, many of their planned programs are being held up for political reasons while land claims are under consideration.

Mr. Speaker, mining has and is continuing to open a lot of doors for many northerners – whether its jobs, training or new business ventures. The industry places a high priority on creating a skilled northern workforce and is keen to participate in the planning of further transportation infrastructure in the North.

The mining sector deserves the recognition it receives during Mining Week, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to encourage all Members and the public to take part in the various events around the city this week. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause