

15th Legislative Assembly

Fifth Session

February 7-22 & March 5-12, 2007

Third Sitting / Budget Session

FEB 7, 2007

Closure of Weather Centres by NAV Canada

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, before I start my statement, I, too, would like to pass on my deepest condolences to my colleague Mr. Yakeleya, who recently lost his mother, Ms. Laura Lennie. My prayers are with him. Also to the family of former Member, Mr. Vince Steen.

Mr. Speaker, today I would like to address a very disturbing decision made by NAV Canada to close the weather centres in Norman Wells and in Yellowknife. As I understand it, northern pilots will now have to rely on information which is relayed to a base in North Bay, Ontario, some 3000 kilometres away, to get much needed weather information.

The North, as we all know, is very reliant on air travel to access our people, our communities and our resources. In fact, air travel is actually fundamental to our transportation needs throughout our entire territory. The decision to close the weather centres here is absurd. We do not have a well-developed highway system like most of the rest of southern Canada. Air travel here is a necessity, a way of life. A safe environment for our pilots and the travelling public to operate in is a must.

I was very concerned that recent news articles would suggest that the decision by NAV Canada to pull out of Yellowknife and Norman Wells was because of a dispute they were having with the Department of Transportation over leasing space at the Yellowknife Airport. Is that worth losing our vital weather service? What exactly is the real story in all of this?

The reality is that the Yellowknife Airport is amongst the 10 busiest airports in this country. Last year it had 66,137 takeoffs and landings. Pilots servicing our constituents need and require detailed, up-to-the-minute weather forecasts.

Mr. Speaker, there have been recent tragedies in the Northwest Territories that may have, in fact, been weather related. As a government, we can just not afford to discount or erode the safety of the travelling public any longer. These weather centres need to be reopened immediately.

Mr. Speaker, at the appropriate time today I will have questions for the Minister of Transportation in this regard. Mahsi cho.