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Deh Cho Bridge Project

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak today about the Deh Cho Bridge project. I want to state for the record, Mr. Speaker, that I do support the Deh Cho Bridge being built. Most Yellowknifers and residents of the North Slave would certainly welcome the construction of a bridge across the Mackenzie River.

I do, however, have some concerns regarding the project and I feel that before agreements for a project like this are entered into, they should be subject to public information sessions and consultations with stakeholders. Every opportunity should be taken to ensure that as many opportunities are made available to northern business and people in the construction of such a large piece of public infrastructure.

The Deh Cho Bridge Act, which is legislation that was passed by the last government, gives authority to Cabinet to enter into agreements to build a bridge across the Mackenzie River. In the Deh Cho Bridge Act, there is no requirement for the government to consult or come back to Regular Members regarding agreements that are entered into. Mr. Speaker, what I'd like to see is that if this project is proceeding, I want the government to consult with Regular Members and stakeholders. We need and we deserve to have the opportunity to ask questions about this project.

The loan guaranteed to the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation has been increased several times over the past three years, from \$2 million in 2004 to just over \$4 million in March of this year. When the government was questioned as to why the loan guarantee was continuously increased, the first answer offered up was that the government was waiting for federal dollars to make the project viable.

I'd like to provide a short quote from last October's sitting from the Premier, and I quote. "Mr. Speaker, it's our view that there is infrastructure money coming and we should not jump the gun here and be premature. Let's wait to see what the federal government has to offer." The project, Mr. Speaker, is going to cost in excess of \$130 million, and judging from the Premier's sessional statement today, it would seem to me that the government isn't waiting.

The Department of Transportation is marching headlong into making agreements in the absence of any federal dollars becoming available for this project. If the project does cost in the magnitude of \$130 million, what will that do to tolls -- which, by the way, Mr. Speaker, we're never supposed to go over \$6 a ton. What will this do to the price of consumer goods in Yellowknife and in the North Slave region?

Mr. Speaker, everybody wants a bridge and I just want to ensure that the entire process is as open and transparent as it possibly can be. Mahsi.

--- Applause