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Support For The Diamond Cutting And Polishing Industry

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to bring up the topic that Members of this House will hear me speak a great deal about over the next few weeks. That topic, Mr. Speaker, is diamonds, and today specifically how they relate to our secondary industry here in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, in 1997, as a city councillor, I was honoured to be a member of the City of Yellowknife's Diamond Task Force on the development of a secondary industry here in the Northwest Territories. That committee, with the help of the GNWT, made it possible that we could move forward with a cut and polish industry here in the Northwest Territories.

As time went on, many people became skeptical of what the GNWT was doing with loan guarantees and support to this industry, and even whether or not the industry itself was viable here in the Northwest Territories. I must add that I, too, was becoming skeptical of the GNWT's involvement. In July of last year, I had the opportunity to stand in for the Minister of RWED at an International Diamond Conference in Tel Aviv, Israel. While I was at this conference I was amazed at the reception and respect the Northwest Territories received. I suppose when you are from an area of the world that produces 14 percent of the world's total production of diamonds by value, you get that respect.

The NWT and Yellowknife are on the radar of the world diamond community. Make no mistake about that. The City of Yellowknife's motto as diamond capital of North America has taken firm hold. In Israel, where they do not mine any diamonds, they have established an entire section of the city of Tel Aviv devoted to diamonds: cut/polish, jewellery, an exchange and even a museum, Mr. Speaker.

I left there with a rejuvenated spirit of what we can do in the Northwest Territories. While I was in Israel, I met with Mr. Lev Leviev who, as many know, is one of the world leaders in the cut and polish industry. He was very interested in coming to Canada to set up a factory, and, shortly after the conference, submitted a proposal to take over the Sirius factory here in Yellowknife. I was very excited at the possibility of having a company like Leviev's here in the Northwest Territories to help grow and secure our secondary industry.

It is public knowledge that negotiations with the receiver and the Leviev Group broke off two weeks ago. I would like to know why. I would like to know what happened to the understandings and the agreements that this government had in place with the producers. What did we do or not do as a government to ensure successful completion of these negotiations?

As a government, we have an obligation to our residents, and I believe the government has an obligation on this side of the House to explain what happened – to explain what went wrong. It is, of course, costing the government a tremendous amount of money, Mr. Speaker. At the appropriate time on today's order paper I will have questions for both the Minister of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development and the Minister responsible for the Financial Management Board Secretariat. Thank-you.

---Applause