

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

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### **Deh Cho Bridge Concession Agreement**

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to speak today about the process that the Deh Cho Bridge has been following. Again, for the record, Mr. Speaker, I want to state unequivocally that I support a bridge being built across the Mackenzie River. Some might wonder why I am so upset at the process, and again, I want to give you some reasons why.

Let's start with the loan guarantee to the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation. It has increased five times in the life of the last government. The first four times the government told the Regular Members that we were hanging onto the hopes that the federal government would inject capital dollars into the project. Mr. Speaker, that never happened. The last time the loan guarantee was increased to the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation by \$5 million, it was to start work on a project that the government had told us adamantly would not happen without federal money.

Mr. Speaker, there was a fundamental shift in this project from a self-finance project to one in which the Government of the Northwest Territories would need a top-up every year with \$2 million indexed for the next 35 years; a decision, if I could remind Members, that was not ratified by Members, not subject to an updated public consultation process, and not put through our macroeconomic policy shop for further analysis.

Mr. Speaker, there was also no cost-benefit analysis done on the new numbers. This, on the largest piece of public infrastructure in our territory's history. Members deserve better and the public deserves better. The cavalier attitude of the last government was showcased again for me when I learned that the concession agreement was signed by the previous government three days prior to the election, on September 28th.

Obviously negotiations are part of any agreement. That is why I was looking forward to at least having an opportunity to question the government on agreements before they were signed. Members deserve the right to ask questions, especially on a project that is going to cost \$165 million. I believe our negotiating ability was undermined by political deadlines and that is no way to serve the people of the Northwest Territories.

So, Mr. Speaker, here we are today with so many questions and still so little in the way of answers. This government can now sit comfortably on that side of the House and point the finger on a decision made by the last government. That's not good enough either, Mr. Speaker. We need to be able to be accountable to the people we serve; transparency must always be at the forefront.

We must find out what happened in this case so we don't make the same mistakes twice. That is why yesterday I called for a full public inquiry into the Deh Cho Bridge process and that is why I remain so disturbed at how this process is playing itself out, Mr. Speaker. Mahsi cho.

--- Applause