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Economic Losses From Migrant Workers

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to continue with the topic I raised yesterday in the House when I spoke about the need to address the 3300 migrant workers and the \$350 million they take with them every year.

I've recently been advised that De Beers Canada is, as of January 1, 2008, providing a \$600 per month allowance to employees living more than 500 kilometres from Edmonton, which they consider as the point of pick-up. I can appreciate that De Beers does have a business to run and does need to have some flexibility. However, when they are making things that much easier for employees to reside in southern Canada, then we as a government have to say something.

Ten years ago when I would travel home from the South and board a plane in Edmonton, I would know close to half the people on that plane. Today I'd be lucky to know three or four people, and I am in the business of knowing people. The planes flying into Yellowknife today are filled with migrant workers.

I'd like to say again today that something needs to happen to mitigate this practice. How closely are the socioeconomic agreements being monitored? We still have high pockets of unemployment in our small communities, and opportunities need to be given to those who need them. I receive calls and e-mails from people, even here in Yellowknife, who can't get a foot in the door of the big three diamond mines.

We need to look at speaking to the mining companies to look outside the current catchment areas. Contracts with companies doing work for them should include workers from the Northwest Territories, whether they're from Inuvik, Fort Smith or Fort Simpson. If we need to look at community registries, let's do that. Training and opportunities are passing Northerners by in favour of relatives and friends from southern Canada. It is imperative that we identify those workers in our communities who require opportunities.

As a government we should also be trying to help communities like Hay River, Fort Smith, Fort Simpson, Inuvik and Yellowknife get a coordinated campaign together to attract workers to live in our territory. We need to find ways to roll out the welcome mat to migrant workers.

Our communities have lots to offer, Mr. Speaker. Let's help them get that message into the hands of the migrant workers. Mr. Speaker, I'll have questions for the Minister of ITI at the appropriate time. Thank you.