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Deh Cho Bridge Project

Mr. Ramsay: During our last session in November I asked a number of questions pertaining to the Deh Cho Bridge project, and how it was that the government of the Northwest Territories signed off on a concession agreement three days prior to the last territorial election.

Mr. Speaker, just today members received a letter from the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation in response to questions that have been asked about the project. I'd like to thank them very much for their letter and, once again, state for the record that I'm not opposed to a bridge being built across the Mackenzie River. I respect and admire the conviction and the courage shown by the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation and the people in Fort Providence to get the project to where it is today.

Mr. Speaker, my concern is about the process, the government's involvement, and the lack of accountability and transparency in that process. During the life of the last government, I sat through numerous briefings on the Deh Cho Bridge and was told many different things by the former government and Premier that today just are not factual. Someone has to be held accountable to the residents here in the Northwest Territories on the level of misinformation that was provided.

First off, the last government consistently told members that the project was not proceeding without substantial federal dollars. The loan guarantee was increased many times while we waited for the feds to come up with the infrastructure dollars. And then came the day that the former Premier told members that the project was proceeding, even though it was now \$160 million and without any investment from Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, we needed to come up with an additional \$2 million per year for the project, indexed for the next 35 years. The 15th Assembly never approved the additional spending, nor were we given an opportunity to debate and vote on the money required for the project. That has always been my fundamental issue with the process. In regard to the equity of the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation, I do remember the former government selling the Members of the former Assembly on the merit of the project, as it would put a guaranteed rate of return revenue back into the community of Fort Providence.

Today, this is just not a reality. The government of the Northwest Territories signed a concession agreement with a corporation it knew was not fulfilling one of its primary objectives. Again, a process issue for the GNWT.

Mr. Speaker, that brings me to the question of where the information is on the project. The updated detailed cost-benefit analysis continues to be as hard to find as accountability and transparency in the process. Also, the concession agreement continues to be elusive. We need to ensure the public has confidence in us to make decisions in the best interests of the Territory.

No one Premier or Cabinet should ever be able to commit the GNWT to this type of expenditure without the approval of the members of this Legislative Assembly.

Mahsi.