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Elimination of Business Incentive Policy

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to speak about the government's intentions in regard to the Business Incentive Policy, and I thank Ms. Bisaro for her statement earlier today.

Since its inception there have been numerous debates, motions and discussions surrounding the Business Incentive Policy in this House. I listened to Minister Michael McLeod's statement yesterday, where he suggested that the government's intention is to scrap the BIP from GNWT contracts.

This is something the government cannot simply cut. This action would have far-reaching impact on all of our communities. I am surprised – well, then again, maybe not that surprised – that Cabinet would reference it in a Minister's statement before having had a full discussion with Regular Members.

It is nice that the government proposes to advise us on the revised approach and its implementation. However, at that stage of the game what meaningful input could we really have into the process? I get a really uneasy feeling that it will be much like other government initiatives, where Regular Members will continue to be just an afterthought in the government's overall plans.

If the government does follow through on scrapping the BIP, have they given any consideration as to what will happen to existing businesses and their future in our communities? I can't help but think that given the hot economy in Western Canada and the lower operating costs, businesses would simply relocate to Alberta. And instead of having an office or a warehouse here in the Northwest Territories employing 20 people, they might just need one employee with a phone number and a BlackBerry.

If anything, Mr. Speaker, we need to improve and enhance the BIP. We need to ensure that truly 100 per cent owned Northern businesses are able to have an advantage, and let's be realistic. It does cost more to do business here. The money we do spend stays here in the North, and we protect the 100 per cent owned Northern businesses that we do have.

As a government we have to do more monitoring and take the guesswork out of who is Northern and who isn't. I don't want to see us lose more companies, people and economic opportunities to the south. We have to protect our own. If we don't, who will? I certainly look forward to asking questions of the Minister of ITI at the appropriate time. Mahsi.