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Proposed Changes to Territorial Parks Seasonal Campsites

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to use my Member's statement today to discuss recent events and decisions made in regard to park operations here in the North Slave region.

Three weeks before the parks and campgrounds were set to open on May 15, it appeared that ITI was going to implement a new set of rules for seasonal campsites. The allotment was going to change at both Prelude Lake and Reid Lake. The available duration was set to change, as was the pricing. All of these proposed changes were developed in isolation by ITI. There was no public consultation. There was no consultation with Regular Members or Members who would be hearing complaints from the public.

How is it possible that ITI could have eight months since the end of last park season to come up with a plan and consult, and the best they could do was to cause a public uproar by proposing to change operations just weeks before the parks were set to open? It was only after considerable outrage by the public and Members of this House that ITI decided to stay with the status quo for this year, and I do thank them for that.

To me, all of this was completely avoidable had the department consulted with the public. I believe and hope that the Minister and the department got the message. I also believe we need to be doing more to get additional seasonal sites in our parks so that as many residents and tourists as possible can have access to sites to camp in.

I worked as a parks officer in the North Slave region for eight years, and I learned very quickly that campers are a very passionate and vocal group. Certainly before any changes are contemplated or made, the public is going to have to have an opportunity for meaningful input into the process.

I also want to say how completely ridiculous the reservation fees are for the public booking campsites. They've been lowered this year, and I guess we should be thankful for that. However, I just do not understand why money paid to reserve a campsite is not offset against actual camping fees. It costs enough for families to go camping in the North Slave region as it is, and to add cost to the reservation is absurd. I'll have questions for the Minister of ITI at the appropriate time. Mahsi.