

16th Legislative Assembly

Third Session Third Sitting May 27 – June 4, 2009

JUN 3, 2009

Deh Cho Bridge Project

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak today about the Deh Cho Bridge project. This project, pegged at \$165 million, is slated to cost the Government of the Northwest Territories \$4 million per year indexed every year for the next 35 years.

Mr. Speaker, in yesterday's question period I had a number of questions to the Minister of Transportation regarding the current and future disposition of this project. The most alarming issue was the fact that even though piers are in the water and close to \$40 million has been spent to date, there is still no firm design for this bridge. How is it possible for a construction company to put a fixed price on a massive piece of public infrastructure like a bridge across the Mackenzie River with no firm design? How or why would any government agree to this so-called fixed price?

Mr. Speaker, Members who were here during the 14th Assembly will recall what changes in design can cost the government. All we have to do is look back at the construction of North Slave Correctional Centre, with the many design changes and the 40 percent over budget attributable mostly to design changes.

Yesterday during question period I asked the Minister if the Government of the Northwest Territories and Department of Transportation had done due diligence on the bridge design prior to signing the Concession Agreement. The response I received from the Minister was, and I quote from unedited Hansard, page 49, "I think the project has followed all the rules and regulations up to now." He continues on, "There may have been, could have had and should have maybe had this all signed off prior to the project starting."

As the Minister and government are well aware, I've had some serious concerns about the process that allowed a concession agreement to be signed in secret and on a Friday afternoon three days prior to the last election in 2007. In response to questions on the bridge project, former Premier Joe Handley stated as far back as March 25th, 2004, in Hansard page 305, "The design for the bridge is being finalized." And on May 26th, 2004, page 540 of Hansard: "The Deh Cho Bridge Corporation have, to my knowledge, basically finished the design for the bridge and we are awaiting for cost estimates from them and expect to have those estimates, based on the design they have..." Again, this was five years ago.

Then there's this one from page 546 of Hansard: "It is one that the design is a very serious issue, and one that I assure the Member that we'll be as thorough as we possibly can in reviewing the design that is put forward by the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation."

It is evident that this review of the design did not happen prior to the Government of the Northwest Territories entering into the Concession Agreement. Even the current Minister of Transportation got into the mix on February 28th, 2005, page 1612 of Hansard, "The design has been worked on for some time now. It's down to a couple of small issues."

Well, obviously there are more than just a couple of small issues outstanding as there still remains no design on a \$165 million bridge that this government signed up on.