

**16<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly**

**Fourth Session**

**First Sitting**

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**Deh Cho Bridge Project**

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak today about the Deh Cho Bridge project. For years I've questioned the process that allowed the decision to build the Deh Cho Bridge. Mr. Speaker, I'm still of the opinion that both the Deh Cho Bridge Act, which was passed late in the life of the 14th Legislative Assembly, and the eventual process that allowed the Government of the Northwest Territories to enter into the concession agreement with the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation was, indeed, thoroughly flawed.

The bridge is being built, Mr. Speaker, and I realize I just can't fight the process any longer. What I will and can do is continue to monitor the project in an effort to try to minimize our government's exposure to financial risks. I will question any increase to the already absurd amount of public dollars that are going to go into this bridge over the next 35 years.

Mr. Speaker, what kind of government would knowingly spend \$160 million to increase the cost of living to all communities in the North Slave region or those serviced by air from Yellowknife? The fact is, there are going to be tolls on all goods being transported across the bridge at Fort Providence. Rest assured these costs will be passed on to consumers on food, home heating fuel, gas, on building materials, on everything, Mr. Speaker.

From a public interest standpoint, there remains many questions. Firstly, where exactly is the finalized bridge design? How come it has not been concluded as of yet? It is obvious, Mr. Speaker, that in order to protect the interest of the Government of the Northwest Territories, the Department of Transportation has stepped into the overall management of the project in a big way and I want to thank the Minister for doing that, although this does come with a cost.

Then, Mr. Speaker, how many liens are currently placed against the project? How exactly is the public purse exposed in these areas? I have never understood why the government did not include the installation, maintenance and operation of the toll system into the concession agreement, which to me continues to defy any logic. This large oversight has forced us to incur a million dollars in capital costs and the government does not yet have a handle or know exactly what the system will cost on an annual basis to add to our already \$4 million a year effort into that bridge.

Mr. Speaker, now that the bridge is being built and DOT is involved in the project management, we have to, now more than ever, step up the oversight on the project as it moves forward. I will have questions for the Minister of Transportation at the appropriate time. Thank you.