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Deh Cho Bridge Project

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm going to again discuss the Deh Cho Bridge Project.

I'd like to thank the government for providing the technical briefing to the media yesterday, although I still don't understand why it had to be held downtown in a boardroom when we have a dedicated meeting room here at the Legislature, and it should have been held with the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Finance there to answer questions.

Mr. Speaker, this was a technical briefing introducing some new members of the project management team to the media. The briefing lacked any clear and concise financial details for the media and, ultimately, the public to see.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that a contract was signed with Ruskin yesterday to complete the project. Why, then, can't the government come clean to the public about the current financial disposition of this project and the impact this project has had and will continue to have on the finances of this Territory – not just today, Mr. Speaker, but well into the future?

This is a very key issue, Mr. Speaker. Germane to all of this is whether or not the entire \$165.5 million borrowed against the project will be entirely on the Government of the Northwest Territories' books. If this happens, Mr. Speaker, it is a nightmare scenario for this government. Beginning next year we'll need to cut expenditures, reduce infrastructure spending and our ability to look at new or strategic initiatives will be greatly curtailed.

Mr. Speaker, I will not and cannot divulge the contents of briefings Regular Members have had on this project and I appreciate the confidential nature of these efforts, but I'm having a difficult time understanding why some of the information presented was not given to Regular Members in hard copy. What happened to open and transparent government, Mr. Speaker, and when will the public know about the financial status of this project?

Mr. Speaker, it is best practice and an industry standard that when a general contractor is removed, as well as a project management team, a full audit is done of the project. How can you move forward with any financial certainty when you don't know where you've been? Our Department of Transportation and the new management team have inherited a project that has been mired with problems from the onset. This audit should have been conducted. The Deh Cho Bridge Corporation's records and books should be audited. This before any contract is signed or entered into.

But, Mr. Speaker, as we know, it's too late to do that right now. We are pressing forward, we have negotiated a one-sided deal with one company. We're pressing forward. We have negotiated a one-sided deal with one company. Again, the public purse is not being protected here. Mark my words, we have set ourselves up for further cost overruns on this project by not tying off all of the loose ends. Taxpayers will again be taken for another ride on the second half of this project. We have set the stage, Mr. Speaker, for it to be a very expensive ride.

Mr. Speaker, I've said it before, and I'll say it again today, that this project has the possibility of crippling the Territory's finances. Mr. Speaker, this is the sad reality we are faced with and I'll have questions for the Minister of Finance at the appropriate time. Thank you.