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Cost of International Calling Cards in The NWT

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to bring up an issue today that has been brought up to me by constituents. Yellowknife is a very culturally diverse city. Our population of Philipinos, Japanese, Somalis, Chinese and other immigrant populations continues to flourish. I like to refer to Yellowknife as a cultural mosaic when describing it to those unfamiliar with our capital city.

In my travels to communities like Hay River and Inuvik, you can also see the changes in the cultural dynamics of those two towns. When making the decision to move to Canada, families can and do get separated by thousands of miles. Keeping in touch with loved ones is something very important to people. For most people the telephone is still the way this communication takes place.

Most people calling family and friends, whether in Southeast Asia, Europe, Africa, or the Caribbean, like to buy the prepaid calling cards which are sold around our Territory. They come in a variety of names and denominations. The problem is that a card which is sold here, which is identical to ones sold in Edmonton, does not translate into the same number of minutes available.

For some reason, NorthwesTel charges those using the calling cards 25 cents a minute just because the call originates in the Northwest Territories. A \$20 card purchased and used here in Yellowknife would yield 14 minutes for a call to the Philippines. The same card used in Edmonton would bear more than 100 minutes.

Where is the fairness in this? Why is this charge of 25 cents being put on our residents using these cards? The supposed toll-free access numbers are being subjected to this surcharge and I'm having trouble understanding why this is allowed to happen.

Customers using these calling cards should have equal and fair access to services. It is obvious that our residents are being gouged by someone for doing their best to stay in touch with their loved ones back home, which is shameful. I will have questions for the Minister responsible for consumer protection at the appropriate time.