

Yellowknife deserves more from MLA O'Reilly

Mining continues to provide significant benefits to the Northwest Territories, its residents, businesses and public and Indigenous governments. Yellowknife, in particular, has seen the bulk of those benefits and most of us who remember when the gold mines closed, are grateful that diamonds have come along.

Our chamber is a strong supporter of all things mining, it works hard to provide truthful information about our industry and what the minerals industry needs to remain responsible and be healthy again.

The recent move by some MLAs to remove Minister Schumann from cabinet has prompted me to weigh in on comments by one MLA in particular, who represents the Yellowknife riding of Frame Lake. In his questioning of Minister Schumann, MLA Kevin O'Reilly seems to demonstrate a lack of support for government's work to strengthen the minerals industry.

While I honour every MLA's right to say whatever they want as elected officials, when Mr. O'Reilly tells the public that he wants mining as much as anybody else, something needs to be said. The facts could be seen as suggesting otherwise. He should come clean with the public and his constituents: he is not a supporter of the minerals industry.

As Northerners, we have seen evidence of his anti-mining sentiment mounting throughout the life of this assembly, but let's simply look at his recent questioning of Minister Schumann. I've added my observations.

What we heard: "While billions of dollars of resources are extracted here each year, revenues to our government have been described by an international expert as paltry."

In fact, that expert correctly explained that royalties were low because of the mines' high cost of building winter roads every year and their costs to generate their own power. This was missing in the MLA's comments.

Mr. O'Reilly criticized the minister for the government's "relentless pursuit of large projects such as the Slave Geological Province Road and Taltson (power) expansion." In fact, this kind of infrastructure investment requires leadership and vision. And it creates legacy benefits. Remember, the power and roads that we take for granted today north and south of Great Slave Lake are due to mining. Ironically too, the international expert he defers to explained that with roads and power, mining royalties would be higher.

Mr. O'Reilly says he is "deeply disturbed" by the Resources and Energy Development Information (REDI) initiative, stating it is "more about promotion of resource development than about providing balanced information and tools to enable citizen participation in resource development decisions."

In fact, the government's REDI initiative is quite unique, it includes every relevant department at its events in an effort to provide balance. REDI is a very responsible

government initiative and teaches youth about how industry works and the career opportunities it provides. Our youth would lose out without this initiative.

Perhaps his statement that is most contrary to his track record is: "I want mining too, as much as anybody else."

Quite frankly, we have seen no actions or statements from the MLA to make us believe that he really supports mining.

Mining can continue to be responsible and strong, but it will take many supportive actions from governments. The most important is to listen to and help investors with their needs. You don't go fishing with bait that you like, rather what the fish likes. Our Chamber gathers and passes that bait on to government regularly.

Interestingly, we have yet to see MLA O'Reilly in our office or calling us up to ask



GUEST Columnist

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Frame Lake MLA Kevin O'Reilly, right, in the legislative assembly in 2016 - questions why the capital budget shows infrastructure spending dropping.

what he can do to help the minerals industry or even provide comment on what he thinks we might do better.

I understand that not all MLAs will be supportive of mining. That is what the process is about.

We have come a long way in trying to educate the public on our strong regulatory system, the social and economic responsibility the industry feels in the regions in which they work and how governments continue to ask

industry to do much of their work on consultation. Like it or not, as an elected official MLA O'Reilly represents a constituency of miners and mining businesses. He lives in a city built on and strongly reliant on, mining. When he speaks inaccurately about the NWT's number one industry, his comments can affect all Northerners' lives. I hope his constituents will take him to task in the coming election.

I think Yellowknifers - and all Northerners - deserve better from their MLAs.