

MEMBER'S STATEMENT – GREAT SLAVE – February 6, 2008

DEH CHO BRIDGE PROJECT

During my campaign and in follow-up discussions with Members of this 16th Legislative Assembly, it's clear that residents of the Northwest Territories expect a transparent and accountable government – no, actually, they demand an open, transparent and accountable government.

During this Assembly's strategic planning session, it was further reinforced by the Members that accountability and transparency should be a priority for all of us, as well as the public service as a whole.

Unfortunately, the government doesn't seem to be doing a good job of living up to this expectation. The lack of information and continual surprises arising out of the construction of the Deh Cho Bridge is a primary example of how government is not living up to the ideals of an open, transparent and accountable government.

Members of this Assembly, as well as of the previous Assembly, have continually asked the government to come forward with information that will help Northerners understand the benefits of the bridge and the impact it will have on all residents. They have also asked for clarity and transparency on the process that has moved the development of this bridge forward. Yet answers are often vague, often muddied and sometimes of no real substance. Further new wrinkles and surprises seem to come up on a fairly regular basis, often at the last minute. This is unreasonable.

If we as MLAs can't get the information, how can the government expect the people of the N.W.T. to have confidence in the G.N.W.T. and believe that we are open, accountable and transparent on any issue, including but not limited to things like the \$135 million in budget reductions currently being faced by the G.N.W.T.

As a Member of this Assembly and a long-time resident of Yellowknife and the N.W.T., I look forward to the day I can actually drive my fuel-efficient automobile across the bridge. As an MLA I would like to be proud of the Deh Cho Bridge, one of the largest infrastructure projects we have ever had. But without transparency and a reasonable distribution of information and facts from the government, it's going to be hard to be proud of it when I do drive across it.

Later this afternoon I will be asking the Premier some questions concerning the Deh Cho Bridge, and specifically about the lack of public information, transparency and accountability related to the project. The residents of the N.W.T. deserved to know how we got here and what the true impact of the bridge will be. For better or for worse, honesty and transparency are important.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.