

SECONDARY DIAMOND INDUSTRY

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to talk a bit about the Secondary Diamond Industry in the Northwest Territories, specifically the cutting and polishing plants. The Northwest Territories is a leader in the Diamond Industry within Canada. We were the first jurisdiction to bring the cutting and polishing of Canadian diamonds to Canada. Bringing the industry here wasn't without significant challenges, many of which the Territory and the companies cutting and polishing diamonds overcame. Others are still posing challenges.

As a government, we provided funding, facilitated training, conducted marketing, arranged for branding. The list can go on and on. We've done a lot. Unfortunately, the local industry is still struggling. Fortunately, there are still polishing plants in the NWT. They are still trying to make a go of it in these difficult economic times. They are still working to employ more workers. Arslanian Diamonds in Yellowknife recently announced that they are starting to rebuild their workforce after layoffs late last year.

You would think that as a Territory, the first area of Canada to pursue and support this secondary industry, we would have adapted and learned from the challenges that we faced. That this Territory would be the strongest secondary diamond industry in the country.

Unfortunately, recent evidence suggests that we are falling behind rapidly. It looks like other jurisdictions have learned from the challenges we faced and have found ways to make secondary diamond industries work within their provinces. Places like Saskatchewan and Ontario. We forged the way and they learned from our reactions and responses to the challenges faced.

Recently a new polishing plant has opened in Saskatchewan. Embee Diamond Technologies Inc. What's interesting is that they found a way to open a new facility in the same market conditions which almost completely shut down the NWT cutting and polishing industry. Even more interesting is that Embee's President, Mike Botha, is finding a way to make it work in Saskatchewan. Now, some of you might remember this name. Mike Botha worked as the occupational certification officer for the diamond industry in the NWT under the Department of ECE and was also the technical consultant for the Department of ITI for their Government Diamond Certification Program.

Mr. Speaker, it appears to me that our former employees learned enough about the industry to make a secondary diamond industry work in different Canadian jurisdictions. Yet, we continue to struggle. What is this government going to do to reverse this trend and put the NWT back on top as a Canadian leader in the secondary diamond industry?

Potential Questions

Thank you Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister responsible for ITI and are in follow up to my member's statement from earlier today.

1. As mentioned in my statement it appears as though former GNWT employees have taken the lessons learned as part of the NWT secondary diamond industry and are applying it in other jurisdictions. It appears that these southern operations are going to be fairly successful. If this knowledge works in other jurisdictions why does the NWT secondary diamond industry continue to struggle while others grow? What is the Minister Department doing to re-vitalize the NWT cutting and polishing industry?
2. Earlier this week I met with a constituent who happens to be a former diamond polisher. When laid off, due to downsizing, last year he and his family decided to stay in Yellowknife in hopes of returning to his diamond cutting and polishing position once the market returned. Now, he has been contacted by Embee to go work in their factory. He tells me that 13 families are considering leaving the NWT to work for Mr. Botha in Prince Albert. 13 families is roughly 39 people. At \$22,000 per person this means that at least \$858,000 in federal transfers will leave with them. This affects all northern. What is the Minister going to do to help expedite the re-vitalization of the local industry in hopes that these 13 families do not leave the NWT.