

Speaking Notes – Avalon Public Hearings

Good evening, everyone, and thank you for coming tonight.

My name is Robert Bouchard. I'm the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Hay River North, and I've come to share some of the reasons for my support and my constituents' support, for the Avalon Rare Metals mining project at Thor Lake.

I was born and raised in Hay River, and before going into politics, I worked closely with Hay River's small business community. Hay River has ~~got~~ got a lot to offer for a town its size. It has a railhead, harbour, highway and dedicated entrepreneurs who are ready to take on the new opportunities that would come with this mine.

I understand that during mine construction, there may be a possibility of assembling pre-fabricated parts in Hay River before transporting them to the mine. That's something I would really like to see happen and I encourage all those involved to work together to make pre-staging in Hay River possible.

It's often said that mining is the backbone of the Northwest Territories' economy. The South Slave has not seen any mining activity since Pine Point closed down in the 1980's, and Hay River looks forward to the energy and community development that new residents and increased economic activity bring. Hay River has a lot to offer in terms of schools, recreational facilities and programs. The Thor Lake Mine will make full use of existing infrastructure, and with more people, we'll only be able to offer more.

NTCL will be the barge contractor responsible for shipping the concentrate produced at the Thor Lake Mine to the hydrometallurgical facility at Pine Point. NTCL has a long history of reliable transportation throughout the north. I am a strong advocate for the Hay River harbour, and marine transportation needs. It's good to see a northern company get this contract, and keep jobs here.

The Thor Lake mine will bring much needed job opportunities to South Slave communities. Unemployment rates in places like Fort Resolution, Lutselk'e, the Hay River Reserve and Kakisa are three times as high as those in regional centres. The Thor Lake mine and Pine Point hydromet facility offer an opportunity for people in small communities to have jobs that allow them to support their families and still participate at home. Along with other Members of the Legislative Assembly, I strongly support Avalon's goal of maximizing northern and Aboriginal employment. We continue to encourage all efforts to put people and positions in small communities. I'm pleased that Avalon plans to pick up workers in four of our communities; to open offices in Hay River, and Yellowknife, and encourage skilled workers to move north.

Around this time last year, I asked questions in the Legislative Assembly about energy needs for Avalon and other mining projects. I understand that discussions are underway between the Northwest Territories Hydro Corporation and Avalon to use surplus power from Taltson at Pine Point. Hydro infrastructure is one of the legacies of mining in the Northwest Territories that continues to benefit people today. I strongly encourage these talks to continue, and reach an agreement that is good for the mine,

and for the people of the South Slave. Affordable power is something that will keep business in the north.

In previous decades, mining left some negative environmental effects that raised awareness about the importance of environmental stewardship, but also have made it difficult for new projects to gain full support. I think Avalon has shown commitment to the review process, looked at ways to mitigate the impacts of development and given northerners reason to believe they will uphold high environmental standards. Early last spring, I had a chance to briefly visit the Thor Lake site. Avalon cares about quality of life for its workers and the quality of the environment where it operates. The company is investing in the north, and as much as the rest of us, wants to protect the natural environment here.

Avalon has consistently represented its Thor Lake project at mining industry forums and similar events. I've had the privilege of attending a few of these events, and it is good to see the company do its part to put the Northwest Territories on the map, and show it already has a role as an economic player here.

The Government of the Northwest Territories is keenly aware of the need for workforce development. The diamond mines have invested in educational opportunities to help northerners make the most of mining activity in their territory, as well as to build its own workforce and meet its northern hiring goals. Avalon has also demonstrated commitment to training initiatives. I see an opportunity to build on existing programs to grow and prepare the northern workforce. The global demand for rare metals is high, and we can look forward to a long mine life. The Thor Lake

Mine promises to give young northerners a chance to develop a career in mining, and remain in the communities where they grew up. This is just one of the ways mining activity presents an opportunity for not only economic, but also social and community development.

I encourage everyone at these hearings to listen to one another and be open to finding solutions to our challenges. I believe the social and economic benefits of the Thor Lake mine can help us overcome many of the obstacles. Change will always bring challenge, but this development is an important, positive opportunity for Hay River, and the South Slave to ^{and NWT} grow.