

North**Where's the faster internet? Nunavut senator blasts Northwestel for holding near monopoly**

Competitor says Northwestel's open-access network 'is not usable'

[Beth Brown](#) · CBC News · Posted: Aug 24, 2020 9:22 AM CT | Last Updated: August 24



Nunavut Senator Dennis Patterson wants to see more competition between northern internet providers to lower costs and create more options. (Dennis Patterson)

Nunavut Senator Dennis Patterson is criticizing Northwestel for not sharing its broadband internet network.

The federal government gave the Bell-owned company almost [\\$50 million three years ago](#) to create better broadband in the North, on the condition that Northwestel would share the network with other internet providers.

In a strongly worded statement released to the media last week, Patterson said he doesn't see that happening. He challenged the pan-northern telecommunications company for creating a near monopoly using public funds.

"I've been wanting to press them to allow access to the new data highway paid for by public funds that they're getting so that we can have choices in service providers in the North, just like we have everywhere else in Canada," he told CBC in an interview.

“All you're doing is promising to put more cars onto an already crowded freeway.”

- Dean Proctor, Qiniq

Patterson said if there was truly open access to the network there would be more competition between service providers in North. Better internet would help healthcare, education and boost the economy, he said.

Patterson said he decided to challenge the government and the internet provider after earlier in August, the CRTC announced [\\$72 million for broadband internet improvements](#) in the Northwest Territories, Yukon and northern Manitoba. Most of that money was awarded to Northwestel.





Northwestel says its upgraded network, built using public money, is accessible to other wholesalers. (David Gunn/CBC)

Nunavut was not included in this [funding announcement](#), but a CRTC spokesperson said at the time that a second round of funding that considers Nunavut could be coming. Patterson said he doesn't want to see a repeat with any future funding for Nunavut.

Northwestel says it's sharing the network

Northwestel says what's known as its Tamarmik Nunaliit network is open, and that wholesalers are using it.

"It is not just Northwestel and Bell using the open-access network," the company said in an emailed statement.

Northwestel says the network allows it to offer LTE-wireless technology in each community, so people can use newer smartphones and have faster home internet.

"Prior to these investments, residents of Grise [Fiord], Baker Lake and countless other Nunavut communities had access to only 2.5 Mbps internet speeds and older wireless technology from other providers," said Curtis Shaw, president of Northwestel, in an email statement to CBC.

“The service that is made available to competitors like is really not usable.”

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This summer, Northwestel is continuing to work on upgrades to the new network, which sees [service interruption when it rains](#).

But Shaw has said previously during appearances in 2018 at a meeting with the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs that wholesale access to broadband is not viable in the North.

Dean Proctor of the competing internet provider Qiniq, created with the help of SSi Canada, says what Northwestel is offering them isn't workable. SSi Canada offers service in all Nunavut communities.

"No, we do not have access," says Proctor, referring to the Tamarmik Nunaliit network. "The service that is made available to competitors like us is really not usable.

"They have the benefit of a subsidy for a backbone that is meant to be used by everybody, but it is effectively not being used by anybody but them, which puts them at a predatory advantage," he said.



Dean Proctor of Qiniq, owned by SSi Canada - a competitor to Northwestel - says Nunavut needs more satellite access. (David Gunn/CBC)

Proctor says in general, there isn't enough capacity through existing satellites to meet the demand for internet in Nunavut.

"We need to bring in additional satellites to serve Nunavut now," he said. "Because of COVID-19 there's more demand than ever, but there's an inability to promise more capacity.

"All you're doing is promising to put more cars onto an already crowded freeway." he said.

- [CRTC announces \\$72M in broadband internet improvements for northern communities](#)
- [Rain shouldn't impact Nunavut's data network as badly this summer, officials say](#)

Nunavut's NDP member of parliament Mumilaaq Qaqqaq also released a statement calling out the Liberal government for supporting a corporation over Nunavummiut.

She said it's not practical to ask families to work and learn remotely if they do not have reliable and affordable internet.

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