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POLITICS 30 OCTOBER 2020 - 3:30 PM EDT

Nunavut needs federal broadband internet funding, says senator

“The lack of new funding assistance means that thousands of households are at imminent risk of losing the internet or having to pay huge amounts”



Nunavut Senator Dennis Patterson says that the territory needs immediate support from the federal government to bolster its internet services. (File photo)

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By Meagan Deuling Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Nunavut Senator Dennis Patterson says the federal government needs to move more quickly to allocate money to the territory from its Broadband Fund.

“Today, 18 months after the 2019 budget approved over \$1 billion in much-needed broadband funding, the federal government has not acted on multiple calls for targeted investments that would ensure Nunavut homes continue to have access to the internet at fair prices,” Patterson told the Senate on Wednesday, Oct. 28.

“Federal subsidies ran out months ago” for an internet provider that “serves 67 per cent of Nunavut’s households outside of Iqaluit,” said Patterson, apparently referring to SSi Canada, the operator of Nunavut’s Qiniq and SSi Mobile networks.

SSi Canada has teamed up with the Qikiqtaaluk Corp. to make a pitch for the Broadband Fund to help pay for additional satellite capacity and to build gateway facilities in each community to prepare the way for the eventual arrival of fibre optic cables and low-orbit satellites.

“The lack of new funding assistance means that thousands of households are at imminent risk of losing the internet or having to pay huge amounts,” said Patterson.

Another Nunavut internet provider, Xplornet, announced in August that it would retire one of its northern satellites later this year, and that some customers in Nunavut and Nunavik would be cut off as a result.



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Internet issues raised in Nunavut’s legislature

Nunavut’s MLAs discussed the exchange in the Senate and the territory’s internet issues this week. In the legislature on Thursday, Oct. 29, John Main, MLA for Arviat North-Whale Cove asked Lorne Kusugak, minister of community and government services, how much CRTC funding Nunavut has received for projects related to connectivity and broadband.

“It was unfortunate when the CRTC made those announcements that they didn’t include details for our department,” Kusugak said. He went on to say that he doesn’t have details of any available funding.

Main asked Kusugak what discussions he has had with Bains about Nunavut households not having access to internet as a result of Xplornet disabling a satellite and SSi Canada potentially losing funding.

Kusugak said he’s had brief telephone calls with Bains, and he looks forward to more discussion.

Technology has come a long way in a short time, Kusugak said, and it’s hard to keep up.

“I remember back when I was a kid my mom would write a note on the back of an empty cigarette pack and I would have to deliver it to my neighbour and wait for that message to come back and provide that service.

“It’s still faster to run across the street, unfortunately, at times like this,” he said.

Kusugak referred to ongoing work to run a fibre optic line from Nuuk to Iqaluit.

He also mentioned the possibility of Nunavut residents enjoying improved internet connections in the future thanks to low-earth-orbit satellites.

“There will be hundreds of low-earth-orbiting satellites that we will be able to access, that will be focused to Nunavut communities,” he said.

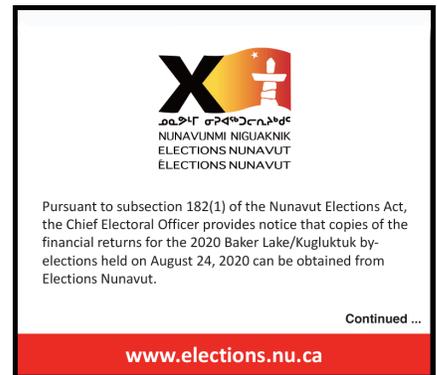
Kusugak said he intends to have conversations with providers of low-earth-orbit satellites in the coming months.

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Posted by surf on 30 October, 2020

“Internet services provided by Northwestel in Nunavut, meanwhile, continue to face periodic disruptions due to rain and fog, “regularly cutting the territory off from the rest of the country and interrupting business, education and health, including as recently as last Friday for a full day,” said Patterson.”



Rain, fog, and snow. This wasn't always a problem. This is a relatively new issue. But it is totally unacceptable that we will have to accept disruptions due to snow. We live in the arctic. Should make for an interesting winter.

[Reply to this message](#)

Posted by Jeff Philipp on 31 October, 2020

The COLES NOTES version of this story that really needs to be shared is that:

1. The federal government has been providing Internet funding support for Households & Students across Nunavut (and Canada in fact) since 2005.
2. QINIQ has bid and won every federal contract to deliver the service since it started in 2005.
3. The last funding, for students & homes, has now run out and SSi Canada is left with the hard choice of what to do. Carrying the full cost is simply not sustainable for long.

Now here is the really frustrating part!

4. QINIQ, in partnership with QC, responded to a CRTC call for proposals LAST November. We submitted a proposal that would EXTEND the funding and INCREASE service levels for another 4 years.
5. Amazingly, 11 months later and we still waiting on a decision while many other regions (The NWT included) have received significant new funding!

So... In order to avoid this impending disaster, SSi Canada has been actively reaching out to ALL Federal & Territorial Organizations, including Senator Patterson.

And THANK YOU Senator.

You truly are, and have always been, a champion for Nunavummiut. We appreciate your decades of leadership, dedication & service.



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In closing, I'd personally like to thank all of the awesome QINIQ customers and community service providers across Nunavut. You folks rock! ❤️

FULL DISCLOSURE

My name is Jeff & I am the Founder & CEO of SSi Canada, which built and operates the QINIQ network. I was born and raised in a small town in the NWT and my family & I call it home so please know this is deeply personal.

[Reply to this message](#)

Posted by Space Cadet 1 on 1 November, 2020

Thank you Jeff for getting us to where we are.

.

However, technology has moved on. The need for broadband support from the Federal government is almost over. In another year or so Elon Musk's StarLink will provide high speed Internet service to remote locations all over the world.

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They have several hundred satellites in Low Earth Orbit and have begun beta testing at mid-latitudes. Their price is \$500 US for the antenna and ground station, along with \$100 US per month for the service. It's high speed, low latency Internet with no cap.

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There is one hitch.

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They have applied for a licence to provide service in Canada, but have received no answer from Ottawa.

.

It will be very costly for anyone to compete with Star Link because the company:

- . Designs their own satellites
- . Manufactures their own satellites
- . Builds their own ground stations
- . Owns the rocket company that launches the satellites

.

Yes, it is a vertically integrated business. It's service is not financially competitive in densely populated areas, so it will never become a monopoly provider of Internet services. But its offering to remote, low-density areas will be almost impossible to match.

By next year the only way SSI Micro or Northwestel will be able to compete is with increased subsidies or if Ottawa continues to deny Canadians the opportunity to purchase a better service at lower price.

Dennis, it's time for you to get Ottawa to shift the support from Internet to air transport.

[Reply to this message](#)

↳ **Posted by Jeff Philipp on 1 November, 2020**

Space Cadet (great name! my handle is Star Lord, should we ever meet online 😊).

First, Thanks for the thanks, and YOU ARE MOST WELCOME! 😊 truly.

Our goal is to ensure folks are connected. As best we can. We don't always do it right but we sure as heck try.

Given the lack of support from the GN & Feds it is amazing Nunavut has more than dialup. Just ask the 3 regional pioneers who started Internet @ Sakku (James Sandy, Ron Dewar) Polarnet (Clare Basler, David General, Darrell O, Richard Evalik) & Nunanet (Adamee & Eva Itorchiek, Jim Mercer & Chip/Jason Devries) how tough it was before we came along. Dial up. It succeed. QINIQ LEAPFROGGED that and delivered the first non line of sight wireless in EVERY community in 12-months! I am still kind of amazed honestly.

Anyway, enough about QINIQ... I'm a YUGE Elon FAN. And you are absolutely correct that SpaceX Starlink will REVOLUTIONIZE access. We are excited for it. What's not to love about low latency pings and hundred megabit service. It's truly fibre in the sky.

Great for anyone with a full time job, street address, bank account & credit card. Those folks will be well served. Unfortunately, the reality is, most QINIQ customers are not so fortunate. We want to be there to serve those folks AS WELL AS the (Space Cadets?) who can afford a Starlink terminal.

Now some sad news I hate to share.

I've heard from Elon. Starlink will not be available (in Polar orbits with any significant capacity) until late next year. So let's say 12-18 months. 18-24 for most folks. Not soon enough.

Currently terminals are \$2,500 USD and being subsidized by Starlink while in beta. It'll be a year or more before the cost comes down.

Anyway Space Cadet. We agree. Starlink will rock.

But ,QINIQ will also kick some serious ass. 😏

We will be there to serve those who cannot afford a contract, or a new terminal. And with luck, and a lot of hard work, we will drive the costs down and service levels up.

As Star Lord, I guarantee it. 😏😎

Have a great night Space Cadet.

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Posted by Jack Napier on 1 November, 2020

Arctic fibre is the future.

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Posted by Jeff Philipp on 1 November, 2020

Uhhh.... Sorry Jack but, HARD no.

Not before Starlink.

Never for most communities.

And what backup when it breaks??

Starlink I suppose! 🤔

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Posted by Surfer on 2 November, 2020

For some communities such as the largest community in Nunavut about 8,000 people and still growing should connect to our next door neighbour that's had fibre for more then a decade now.

With two connections that Greenland has one from Europe and he other from NFLD we would be guaranteed connection and service, Pang, Qik, Kim, can be connected as well. Free up a lot of bandwidth for the other communities on satellite.

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