# Internet service driving man mad

### Qiniq needs federal funding, 'still working to get more done'

By Stewart Burnett Northern News Services

#### Rankin Inlet

"All my friends in Rankin, we complain about our internet," said Billy Gallant. "It's terrible. It's on and off, on and off.'

He put a poll up on Facebook to see if other residents were satisfied with the internet in town, and in more than 100 responses, the vast majority

"So far, three have been satisfied," said Gallant. He's on Northwestel now, but he's used Qiniq in the past. What particularly bothers him are the low data caps – 200gb for Northwestel and 100gb for Qiniq – and the town's notorious evening slowdowns, where Gallant says he will be completely disconnected for several minutes at a time.

The data caps are such an issue that Gallant has been paying more in overage charges than his basic internet plan, estimating he pays about \$800 a month for internet.

He's called Northwestel for explanations several times but hasn't received the answers he's looking for.

Calling and individually complaining is fine and all, he said, but he started his poll to see if there could be strength in numbers to effect some sort of change in the community.

"One person, they're not going to listen to," said Gallant. "But maybe if 96 per cent of the residents of Rankin Inlet are unsatisfied with the internet service, maybe somebody will listen.'

He just wants answers: is there a limitation on internet here, and what is it? Do providers not have capacity to serve the needs of Rankin Inlet residents? Or are they artificially capping usage?

"If there's a limitation, say so, so people can understand and make better choices about their internet," said Gallant.

Though it may not seem like a big deal to some people, Gallant said the limitations can seriously affect those doing university coursework, connecting with family in the south or other professional needs - not just Netflix streaming.

Dean Proctor, chief development officer at SSi Canada, the parent company of Qiniq, gave a lengthy explanation of what the limitations are for internet in Rankin Inlet and the territory, explaining that his company is ready and raring to increase capacity if the federal government can help out.

"The whole question of quality of internet in Nunavut is a topic that is very near and dear to us," he said.

All 25 communities in Nunavut are dependent on satellite, said Proctor, and "there's only so much satellite capacity in space."

In internet terms, the 'backbone' infrastructure is what connects a community to the rest of the world. In the case of Rankin Inlet, it is 'satellite-dependent', and the satellite backbone used by Qiniq connects to a teleport in Ottawa. Then there's the gateway infrastructure in town into which the backbone connects.

Third, there is the local or 'last mile' infrastructure, which is also connected to the hub and is the final piece of how the consumer connects to the local infrastructure, which is either by a wireless connection, like a wingle or router, or a wired home hookup.

"We are constantly working to improve both backbone capacity and the last-mile capacity," said Proctor. "That means we're constantly investing

Since Qiniq began in 2005, the company has invested more than \$100 million into Nunavut's internet, supported by a nearly equal amount from the federal government.

However, the feds haven't been picking up the phone lately, which makes further significant in-



vestments to the infrastructure either challenging or outright impossible economically.

'What has been happening of late, which is very frustrating to us and is even more frustrating to the people living in Nunavut, is that there have been broadband funding programs which are still awaiting decisions," said Proctor.

He named the CRTC's Broadband Fund, which started in 2018. It offered \$750 million over five years, \$75 million of which would be specifically set aside for exclusively satellite-served areas, which is mainly Nunavut in Canada.

The first call for applications came in 2019, and SSi Canada promptly applied. Proctor expected a rapid decision, but "nothing came."

The CRTC then put out another call for applications in 2020, said Proctor, which the company applied for again.

"It is now two-and-a-half years later," said Proctor. "There's still no decision from the CRTC Broadband Fund for Nunavut. There have been no decisions made. They're just sitting there. The last conversation I had with the commission was that no decisions have been made."

Not even a yes or no, he said.

Meanwhile, another arm of the federal government created the Universal Broadband Fund, which SSi also applied to.

This time, the company got short-term funding of \$5 million, while SSi made connections with a commercial satellite operator to free up an entire satellite for northern Canada.

SSi was then able to fly crews to every community in the territory and point their satellite dishes - 36 in total – to the new satellite. That increased capacity by multiple times, said Proctor, and allowed the company to increase data caps

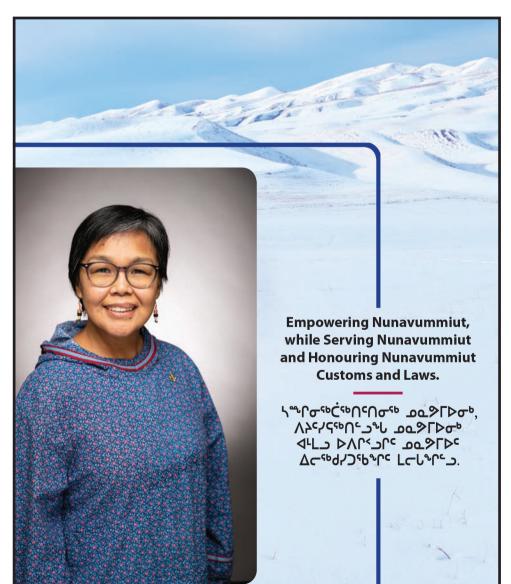
"Is that enough? No," said Proctor. "But it's much better than it was, and we're still working to get more done.'

He's hoping either the Universal Broadband Fund or CRTC's Broadband Fund can come through with the bigger investment needed for SSi to act on.

"We have solutions where we can actually increase very significantly the amount of capacity available to consumers, and for that matter to business and government in Nunavut, and that can come almost immediately," he said. "But we need to work with investing partners on that. So that means the CRTC or the Universal Broadband Fund."

For its part, Northwestel replied to Kivalliq News with an emailed statement and said improvements may be coming soon.

"We've seen significant shifts in internet use as more people are working and studying from home." wrote Northwestel, adding that more devices are connecting at once, impacting the internet experience for some customers. The company states it will continue to make adjustments over the coming weeks to optimize the network.



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# **Cleaning chimneys** of snow and ice urged for safety

Carbon monoxide risk exists when blockages occur

By Stewart Burnett Northern News Services

### **Rankin Inlet**

The Hamlet of Rankin Inlet and the community's fire department are advising residents to ensure their outdoor chimneys and vents are not blocked by

"With extremely cold weather, water vapour leaving the chimney can freeze up and block the chimney, which can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning in the building," stated a joint news release.

The release also made clear that unclogging people's chimneys is not the public bodies' role.

"The hamlet and fire department do not provide this service," the message reads, suggesting those in housing units call housing, homeowners to do it themselves if properly able, or call a local contractor.

