

Aurora board gets the axe

*MLA criticizes decision as 'punishment'; education minister says move provides stability*

Kirsten Fenn

Northern News Services

Friday, June 9, 2017

## SOMBA K'E/YELLOWKNIFE

The MLA representing the riding that includes Aurora College says she does not support the education minister's decision to scrap the school's board of governors.

Education, Culture and Employment Minister Alfred Moses made the announcement Monday he was replacing the board with an administrator in order to support a foundational review of the college's operation.

"I'm not clear how it helps with the foundational review," said Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green in response to the news. "Especially at a time when there is a review of the college going on, I think community interests need to be represented by the board."

Denny Rodgers, former mayor of Inuvik and general manager of the Inuvialuit Development Corporation, assumed the administrator role on Tuesday.

Moses announced the review of the college in March.

It came on the heels of heated debate in the legislative assembly over territorial budget cuts that threatened to shutter Aurora College's social work and teacher education programs.

Green said she feels appointing an administrator gives the education department a "free hand" to do what it wants without the board there to reflect the community's concerns to the college.

"If they're talking about having a college that's on par with southern colleges, they all have boards ... with real rights and responsibilities," said Green.

"(This) looks more like a punishment, although the board was told to make cuts."

Fort Smith mayor Lynn Napier-Buckley, who was on the board of governors at the time, resigned from her role on the board in February because of the proposed cuts.

The minister later halted the cuts and suspended intake into the two programs until a complete look at the college's administration, operations and governance could be completed by this fall.

Now, the foundational review isn't expected to be done until the end of 2017, Moses told Yellowknifer, adding his department still has to finalize terms of reference for the job and find a contractor to do it.

He said he made the decision to appoint an administrator in order to ensure "stability" during the review and implementation of its recommendations.

"It has been done before," Moses said of his decision. "Places like Stanton Territorial Hospital as well as the Beaufort-Delta Health and Social Services Authority have done things like this in the past."

The administrator has the same responsibilities as the board of governors to oversee the college's direction, policy and performance.

Rodgers' appointment is meant to be temporary, according to a statement the minister issued Monday, although Moses could not say whether the board would be invited back or what its future looks like.

Green doesn't have much faith the board will return to its role.

"In other cases where boards have been replaced by administrators, we don't usually get boards back," she said.

That's a concern for her when it comes to the long-term future of the college.

Aurora College was told earlier this year that the GNWT was reducing its funding by about \$1.9 million as a result of territorial budget cuts.

On Feb. 6, the minister said the college identified areas for cutbacks "in co-operation and consultation with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment."

But Green said the decision to cut the social work and teacher education programs was ultimately the department's. Moses cited low enrolment as the reason these programs were chosen.

Yellowknifer reached out to members of the board of governors but they either declined to comment or could not be reached.