

Justice minister grilled on A New Day

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SOMBA K'E/YELLOWKNIFE

The justice minister says he has "no idea" why there were no bidders to run A New Day, although he hopes to have good news about the men's healing program in coming weeks.

"We are dealing with an NGO that has expressed an interest," said Louis Sebert, although he didn't say which organization he was talking about. "I want to see how the negotiations with that NGO or another NGO work out over the next few weeks. If that does not work out, we will have to reconsider."

MLAs grilled Sebert on Friday about A New Day, a pilot counselling program for men who use violence against loved ones. The Tree of Peace Friendship Centre currently administers the program and its contract is up at the end of June.

Many people have expressed frustration with changes the government made to the program in a recent request for proposals to run it, with Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green saying the government decided to "dismantle" it.

Sebert has a different view.

"We have made some minor changes - I regard them as minor - to the program," he said.

But Yellowknife North MLA Cory Vanthuyne said that would be "putting it lightly."

"Obviously the changes don't reflect it being more successful because there was no uptake on the RFP," replied Vanthuyne.

Sebert maintained his optimism that the program will find a contractor by July 1.

\$500,000 for junior kindergarten buses

Buses for junior kindergarten students could cost \$500,000 next year between the city's Catholic and public school boards.

That's according to Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green, who said she received the estimate from the boards.

Green dropped the figure Thursday as she pressed Education, Culture and Employment Minister Alfred Moses to explain whether his department will pay for the expense as part of what has been called a fully funded program.

She worried low income families will be "barred" from the program if buses aren't covered.

"It is at the discretion of the education authorities and councils to decide if they are going to reallocate (GNWT funding) for busing," said the minister. "It is not mandatory for any grades at this point."

Moses said his department needs final junior kindergarten enrolment numbers before it can find a solution to the busing problem but seemed to change course on the subject by concluding he'd cover the expense.

"We will be committed to covering the cost when we get those exact (enrolment) figures," Moses said.