

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 56-18(2): WAGE SUBSIDY FOR CHILD CARE WORKERS

February 24, 2016

MS. JULIE GREEN: My questions today are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. I recently spent some time reading the feasibility study on universal childcare for the Northwest Territories and it contains a number of recommendations which are easy fixes to a system that is quite dysfunctional. My question for the Minister is about the wage subsidy that is now paid to individuals rather than to their employers.

The problem with directing the wage subsidy to the individuals is that there is some delay in getting it to them. I am wondering if the Minister will consider paying these wage subsidies directly to the employer in order speed them up.

MR. SPEAKER: Mahsi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: In this case, with the universal daycare, it is just a feasibility study at this time that was tabled during life of the 17th Legislative Assembly. The department is looking at the study itself and seeing what options we can develop moving forward within the 18th Assembly.

What we are doing is, we are implementing the Right from the Start Early Childhood Development Framework and creating an action plan associated with it. AT this time we're looking at putting our efforts into the work that was done in partnership with Health and Social Services during the 17th Legislative Assembly, and starting up some of those early childhood development programs and services.

MS. JULIE GREEN: Thanks to the Minister for that answer. However, the provision of childcare is a key component of the education of young people prior to them going into junior kindergarten or kindergarten. The people who work in this sector are generally quite low paid and daycares struggle with keeping qualified staff. I'm wondering if the Minister can make a commitment to looking at providing the wage subsidy directly to the employers rather than to the individuals.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: In the 17th Legislative Assembly, some of those concerns were brought forward. We do have funds that go to the daycare providers, but also to creating a Childhood Staff Grant program. We have a scholarship for people that want to go out and get trained. Currently, I believe our programs are working well, but if the Member would like to adjust that issue, it's something that, throughout the course of this government, we can take a look at.

MS. JULIE GREEN: Thank you to the Minister for his answer. What I'm looking for, then, is in order to improve the system of wage subsidies for the people who work at daycares is to have the government look at providing those to employers rather than individuals in order to speed up the payment. What I'm looking for from the Minister is a commitment to investigate making this change.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: The department will look at reviewing this option and bring back those options to the Member. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Item 7, oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. JULIE GREEN: I'd like to thank the Minister for making that commitment. I ask only when he thinks he will be able to deliver this information to us.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Early childhood development is a priority of this government. It became a priority of the 17th Legislative Assembly. Anything that we can do to ensure that our staff and our children have the opportunity to develop in the best way they can. We are willing to work in those areas. I can't commit to a timeframe at this time.