

Committee of the Whole—Environment and Natural Resources Dept. Budget Review

June 8, 2016

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I have a few remaining comments on the corporate management activity that we agreed to yesterday. Therefore, I seek unanimous consent to return to page 87 in the ENR estimates. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Ms. Green. The Member seeking unanimous consent to return to page 87.

---Unanimous consent granted

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): You may continue, Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, today there are or have been, since it's late in the day, 300 children in the Somba K'e Park here, in Yellowknife, for World Oceans Day, and the reason that they're there is because ENR has a public education program that is aimed at teaching children and people of all ages about the different aspects of the ENR mandate, such as wildlife, water, environmental protection, and so on. To that end, I'm very dismayed by the proposed loss of the part-time public education specialist in the department's field support unit, which we spoke about yesterday when we were going through the corporate management section of the plan. The loss of this position goes to principles that we do not want to see front line positions cut, especially a cut in headquarters which has repercussions for the whole of the NWT. And so, to that end, I am wondering if the Minister will consider reinstatement of that position, and so therefore I have a motion that this committee strongly recommends that The Government take immediate action to reinstate funding in the amount of \$21,000 for the proposed elimination of the Public Education Coordinator position in the field support unit under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources under the corporate management activity. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Ms. Green. A motion is on the floor and is being distributed now. The motion is in order. The motion -- oh, one moment. To the motion, Ms. Green.

MOTION 30-18(2):

TABLED DOCUMENT 50-18(2) MAIN ESTIMATES 2016-2017 ENVIRONMENT AND
NATURAL RESOURCES, CORPORATE MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS EXPENDITURES
(PG. 87) REINSTATEMENT OF FUNDING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION COORDINATOR IN
FIELD SUPPORT UNIT

MS. GREEN: So, Mr. Chair, as I said, I asked to return to this section because I feel that this position has tremendous value, not only to this region but to the whole NWT. It is a program in which education is provided to people of all ages. It is a winner of the Premier's Award in 2010 for on-the-land training, and so the purpose of this motion is to ask that this position be reinstated. I realize that we are not able to add money to the budget, but I'm asking for agreement of the whole House that this position be reinstated and that we work out how the funding for that will happen at another point. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Ms. Green. To the motion. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I know that when the business plan came forward to the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment, I'm pretty sure I asked about this position, and I was told by the department that they have other folks that would pick up the work that this position would normally carry out, and I was a bit sceptical about that. I've known the people that have been in that position probably for most of the time I've been in Yellowknife, which is close to 30 years, or that have been involved particularly in that field. They do very important work. I'm not sure if the MLA for Yellowknife Centre talked about the Tundra Science Camp that's run north of Yellowknife, where community elders come in, and there are scientists there, as well; there are some wonderful sharing experiences that take place with youth, as well. That work is largely coordinated by the education specialist position and is something that I'd really like to see continue. So I do support this motion, and I would urge, certainly, all the MLAs on this side of the House to support it and Cabinet colleagues, as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. To the motion. Minister Schumann, would you like to speak to the motion?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I want to speak to this based on the comments that the House has received. Upon reviewing all our positions for this up-and-coming budget session, we reviewed these jobs, and, previous to the proposal of the reduction of this one position, we had one and a half positions within our department for this specific need. And what we propose is we've eliminated the half-time position and, with decentralization, we've actually created one whole new complete position for this in the South Slave, so we have more people serving in this capacity than we did previously. We're actually going to have two full-time people committed to this versus one and a half. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister Schumann. To the motion. Mr. Vanthuyne.

MR. VANTHUYNE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just for clarification, are Members able to question the Minister at this point, relative to his comments, or is that not correct at this point in time?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Procedurally, I'm being told that's not allowed, Mr. Vanthuyne. We can only speak to the motion.

MR. VANTHUYNE: Thank you. So in the spirit of understanding what the Member is presenting in the motion is, what I would believe all of us want as it relates to making sure that the programs that are relative to those positions are still going to be fully delivered, what I'm understanding now from the Minister's comment is that the capacity within the department to continue to fully bring these programs forward and deliver them successfully is going, in fact, still be able to do, that they're still going to be able to do that. And so I guess I'm just wondering at this point what the presenter of the motion may have further comments in that regard now, having heard from the Minister. That'll be my comments for now. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. Vanthuyne. To the motion. Minister McLeod.

HON. ROBERT C. MCLEOD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I think the Minister had commented before that during the business plans that he had -- there was some discussion of this, and I think there were some questions asked of him at the time. The department obviously feels fairly comfortable that they would have this covered off. He did say at the time we have it covered off, or it would be covered off. And I, for one, take his word for it, and I don't think he would be saying it if he didn't have any reasoning for it or trying to pull the wool over committee's eyes. So, if he says that they're comfortable with this \$21,000-reduction but the program is still going to be covered off by existing folks, then we should take that at face value. And so, with that, Mr. Speaker, we will be voting against the motion.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister McLeod. To the motion.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister McLeod. To the motion. I see no more comments. We will proceed to the vote. Question has been called. I'll call upon Ms. Green to conclude debate on the motion.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have no reason to doubt that the Minister is speaking to me in good faith a propos what Mr. R.C. McLeod said. I happen to know the person who is in the position, and I know that she works more than half-time to deliver the programs here, in Yellowknife, and on behalf of the department around the Northwest Territories. And so I feel that, while it is very valuable to have an additional position in the South Slave, that it is also valuable to keep the regional area the headquarters at strength in this role in order to ensure that everybody is well-informed, is well-educated, about the environment that we live in. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Ms. Green.

---Carried