

**ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE**

**QUESTION 610-18(2): PROPOSED ELIMINATION OF AURORA COLLEGE SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM**

**February 20, 2017**

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. My questions are also for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. In my statement, I talked about the importance of training Northerners as social workers out of Aurora College. The program has been in place for 35 years, and some of those who completed the training when it began are still working in the field. My first question is: what kind of information and analysis on the low completion rates for the Aurora College Social Work Program have been used by the Minister in making the decision to cut the program? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Masi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, the department had worked with Aurora College to identify reductions. On average, there are about 38 students who are enrolled within the program. Over the last three years, we have graduated four every year. This June, we are expecting to graduate three students out of the social work program, as I mentioned in this House before; two of the students in the TEP program, as well as the students in the social work program. I encourage them to work hard, study, and complete their programs through the course of the years. We are slowly phasing out these two programs, but we looked at the enrolment rates as well as the graduation rates when we were making these decisions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. GREEN:** Rather than cutting the program, what does the Minister think he could do to help the college remove barriers to completing the social work program and improve graduation rates?

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** I am not really too sure of what a lot of these barriers were for students who enrolled in both programs, and we got low graduation rates out of the two. We also currently support students who are going down south, I believe 19 students who are taking a social work degree. We continue to support them. I am not too sure what some of the barriers were. Obviously, everyone has their own challenges when they're going to school, and some of those are probably taken into account. Our department, they have a great student financial assistance program that supports students financially, and the Aurora College also has support staff who try to work with the students to help them succeed and get the best outcomes.

**MS. GREEN:** I am shocked that the Minister is not sure what the barriers are and that he didn't spend or have his department spend any time looking at what they are in order to understand why both graduation and enrolment rates fall off so dramatically over the period of time that the students are in the program.

Will the Minister commit to looking at these barriers so that he can make an informed decision to reinstate the program?

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** As I mentioned, I know the Aurora College does have a good support staff to help their students graduate in whatever program that they are currently enrolled in. We can take a look and see why students weren't graduating from the social work program or the TEP program as well, and what the successes we have down south are in terms of the 19 students who are going to school down south. We can take a look into it, and definitely with the Aurora College strategic plan and review coming into place, or the strategic plan, hopefully we'll have some good outcomes of that and get better supports for the Aurora College.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Masi. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it seems like an exit interview for people who are dropping out of the program would really facilitate collection of information about what the barriers are. In my statement I noted that social workers with degrees and diplomas will be in high demand over the next 15 years, a total of 600 jobs, so we want people who live here to take these jobs, not come for two years and then move away. Doesn't the number of people required in this profession make the case that social work training is, in fact, a going concern? Masi.

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we are going to be needing social workers over the next 15 years. It was recognized in the in-demand jobs that are going to be needed here in the Northwest Territories, and we continue to support students who want to go get that degree education, and the students who are currently in the program, we want to continue to support them should they want to come out of that diploma and go and seek a degree down south and help them with that smooth transition. We are continuing to support them as the program itself gets phased out to make sure that all students who are in that program can complete the social work program and become part of the public service here in the NWT.