

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 592-18(2)/601-18(2): POLICING PRACTICES IN RESPONSE TO SEXUAL ASSAULT ALLEGATIONS

February 17, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Justice. As I just mentioned, the rate of sexual assault complaints that are dismissed by police as unfounded is almost twice the rate in the NWT as it is nationally. The Yukon Government has mounted a robust response to the rates of unfounded sexual assault complaints, including training police and court workers in updated interview techniques, recruiting more women officers, funding specialized police work and victim services, and ensuring JP's are regularly retrained on emergency protection orders. What kind of response can we expect from the Minister? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Justice.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity to read the excellent story in the Globe and Mail several weeks ago. The Globe gathered its analysis from 870 police jurisdictions and found there was a very large number of claims that were dismissed as unfounded across the country. It was between the various numbers, but generally it was between one and five, or 20 per cent of claims had been dismissed as unfounded. It has been found also, and I read this in the story, that looking at independent research from around the world only 2 to 8 per cent of these claims are actually false.

It was also surprising to see the wide variation in the number of claims that had been dismissed from as low as 2 per cent in the City of Winnipeg to a high of 36 per cent in Yellowknife. Even more surprising was that sometimes adjoining police forces had very different statistics. While there may be some issues as to how the information was gathered, the statistics are clearly very disturbing.

As a result of this study, the various police forces across the country, including the RCMP, have re-evaluated procedures. I can advise that I have met with the commanding officer here in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate that the Minister read the article, but he did not respond to my question. So I'm going to ask again what he is going to do as Minister to bring these unfounded sexual assault complaints down. There are a number of very specific practical actions that are being taken by his counterpart in the Yukon, where the police are also on contract to address this problem directly beyond just having a meeting. What is his response?

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: I aggressively wanted to give some background before I entered into a discussion with the Member opposite about what the RCMP here are doing. I'm pleased to advise that, in my meeting with the commanding officer, he advised me that all sexual assault files from the period 2010 to 2014 were being

reviewed. As I mentioned, it was found in the Globe and Mail study approximately 36 per cent of the cases were dismissed or found to be unfounded.

Now, this is at the investigatory stage, not at the court stage. A closer examination of the figures, that figure of 36 per cent, the RCMP found that 21 per cent were actually found to be unfounded. The other 15 per cent was found that it was insufficient evidence to proceed to court. So they did a careful examination of the many files over the last five years.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate all the homework the Minister has done on this topic, but I'm not hearing a robust response to these findings beyond what the RCMP has already committed to do itself, which is to review all of those unfounded cases. I'm not hearing he is going to take proactive response to what is clearly a crisis in sexual assault complaints here in the NWT as it is across the country.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: In addition to what I've already mentioned with the police reviewing all of these cases, it has been decided that new policies are required so that if a file is found to be unfounded by the investigator all of those files will now be reviewed by a senior officer. So the police are doing something. In addition, they are increasing their training in this area to further sensitize investigators to this issue.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and, Mr. Speaker, that's excellent news. I think the other side of this is to make sure that police officers have better training to deal with complaints as they come in. I'm wondering if the Minister can tell us what changes might be made in training police officers to respond to sexual assault complaints. Mahsi.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I can advise that there will be additional training provided to investigators. As recently as January there was some additional training provided. So the police are very aware of this issue. Additional training will be provided, and hopefully the rather shocking figure that has been mentioned by the Member opposite will decrease. I can advise the police are treating this matter very seriously.

QUESTION 601-18(2): FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION MEASURES

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a set of questions that deal with the unfounded sexual assault complaints for the Minister of Health and Social Services. The questions for Justice really deal with what has happened after the fact, but Health and Social Services is in charge of prevention.

My first question is: how is the department integrating the Globe's findings into the work that it is doing, or planning to do, in combatting violence against women, and family violence? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have had some discussions between myself and the deputy about the Globe and Mail article and the

very disturbing findings in there. I was really happy to hear the work that Justice is doing with the RCMP to attempt to change some of those results for the better.

In the Department of Health and Social Services, we are focusing on a couple of different areas. One of them is prevention. We are utilizing programs like what will it take to get out there and work with residents across the territories to change the perspective, change the attitudes around domestic, as well as violence against women.

We are also working on a different campaign, a series of rants that are very specific to individuals, sort of issues that are raised or coming up, the myth that perpetrators of family violence are simply have a difficulty with anger, that it is not the victim's fault. We are trying to address those issues through a number of these rants. Those are available online in movie theatres and other means across the Northwest Territories. We are making sure that we are trying to incorporate as much national data in those as we can. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister for what sounds like a promising approach. I note that What Will It Take is really about empowering bystanders to intervene in family violence situations. I think that that is another downstream problem. The upstream problem is consent. I think that that is the approach that needs to be taken now, is to ensure that people understand what consent is. I am wondering if the Minister has any plans to pursue that line of thought?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: The Member raises a solid point, and it is a good point. What Will It Take does have significant value. There is no evaluation framework, and that is something that I have committed to working on so that we can see what kind of benefits we are getting over time. We know that social marketing does and can play a key role in challenging people's perceptions, or bringing greater public attention. I take the Member's point, and I think the point the Member is raising is something we might be able to build into one of our future rants that we are sitting out there to get that information out. I would certainly love to sit down with the Member and get more of her thoughts on that particular area, to see how we might be able to incorporate that into one of our future rants as far as getting the information out there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Minister for his openness to this idea. One of the things that we have discussed previously -- I know he is working on some kind of an evaluation for What Will It Take. We have also talked about the possibility of redoing the family violence attitude survey. I'm wondering if the Minister is willing to work with his colleague, the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, to find the money and make this repeat of the family violence survey happen?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: I want to be clear that I am not saying "no," but it is going to sound an awful lot like "no." The survey was done in 2007. There is a lot of information coming from a lot of different stakeholders about the problems of domestic violence and violence against women. We are in a fiscal environment where we have got to make sure that we are getting as much maximum benefit for every dollar we spend. I guess

my question to the Member and the Members opposite is: would I be better positioned to spend money on a survey, or would I be better positioned to spend money on the family violence shelters, putting more money into the awareness campaigns to help change attitudes, change beliefs, and put more money into the health centres to ensure that our healthcare providers are prepared, adequately prepared, to deal with the trauma that individuals who have experienced a sexual assault coming into the health centres are experiencing?

So I guess my question is back to the Members. Is this something we want to make a priority? If it is, if the committee tells me it is, I will certainly pursue that. I am always interested and willing to work with my colleagues, but I guess my question is: is that where we want to invest right now, or do we want to invest in these other areas?

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

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I like the trend in this question period where I am asked the question. Mr. Speaker, the question about the family violence attitude survey, it is \$100,000. That is what it cost before, and it is a very important planning tool in order for the government to make the best use of the money they have in preventing family violence. I would like to think that it is not an either/or. I would like to think that, where the Minister is careful to do planning in other parts of his portfolio, that he would also consider this to be an important planning tool.

I recognize that money is limited, but prevention is really a cost-saving measure. If women are not assaulted in the first place, then they don't need the justice system, the health system, victim services, and all the other supports that result from being assaulted. So, I would like the Minister once again to consider putting this into the next business plan so that we can get a grip on what exactly needs to be done. Thank you.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I didn't say no to the Member's request, but we do have to look at the work that is being done in the Government of the Northwest Territories, and I think there is a lot of information out there already about the significant negative impacts that this issue is having on residents of the Northwest Territories. I would much rather invest in more prevention than doing another survey, but if it is the wish of committee, if committee tells me that that is something they want to see, investment in surveys instead of actions, I am prepared to take their direction and lead on that.