

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 714-18(2): REVIEW OF CONTRACTING PROCEDURES AND REPORTING

March 8, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Finance regarding sole-source contracting. In his October 14, 2016 replies to my oral questions, I asked if the Minister would commit to carrying out an evaluation of the sole-source contract awarding practice and performance, a request to which he agreed. Can the Minister give an update on the status of that review? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Finance.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member is correct: I did commit to providing a formal review. The review is a bit behind schedule right now, and we are looking at providing something to Members in the May-June session. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister for that response. I wonder if the Minister can commit to providing the draft terms of reference or, in fact, the final terms of reference for this review to the Government Operations Committee before the close of this session.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Those are available, and those can be shared. I don't see that there would be a problem sharing; the work is already ongoing, though, so the terms of reference would just apply to the work that is ongoing. If there is a possibility that I could share them with the Members, then I will look into that.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the Minister's commitment to investigating sharing that. I guess it would have been helpful if he had done that before the review began, so that the Government Operations Committee could provide some oversight in this area, which is their responsibility. I also want to talk about reports. We certainly appreciate seeing sole-source contracting reports on a quarterly basis now. I think that that really walks the talk of transparency. It is my understanding that these reports are actually quite easy to produce, just a matter of selecting particular database fields. I am wondering if it would be possible to also increase the reporting on contracts under \$5,000? They are now only produced annually. I am wondering if they could be done more often.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: I take the Member's concern about the terms of reference, and going before government operations before we actually went out, but we are elected to do the work. We go out and do the work, and we are held accountable by the Members' office for the work that we do. Sometimes we need to get out there and actually get to work right away, instead of holding it up with bringing everything forward to government operations. Having said that, the Member's question was contracts under \$5,000, or over \$5,000? I do know that the contracts over \$5,000 document is tabled

once a year, I believe, with all different types of contracts, and they are sole source negotiated. I am not sure if her question was under \$5,000. It is something that I would have to investigate. The Member is absolutely correct: as the Department of Finance, we are posting all of the sole-source contracts on our website, and they are reported on a quarterly basis, and we try to ensure that these reports are updated within 30 days of the end of the quarter. It is easily accessible, and in the spirit of transparency, we are putting everything on the website, so people out there will know which are sole source.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the importance of giving the terms of reference to government operations proactively is that the value of all the contracts left by the government is very substantial. It is a significant piece of business. I understand that you need to get on with the business of governing, and we want you to get on with the business of governing, but I think on an issue this size, it would have been useful for the committee to have contributed its oversight to this issue. I say that, as somebody who is not a member of that committee, that I know that they do good work, and they would have done it in this case, as well. To clarify my question from the previous one, I was wondering if it would be possible to produce reports on contracts under \$5,000, as often as you do the sole-source contracts. Thank you.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Member is correct. Since April 1 to December of this year, there has been a substantial number of sole-source contracts. I believe there are about 290 of them. On the contracts under \$5,000, I would have to look into that, because a lot of that are corporate credit cards and such. I think it will be a substantive piece of work to try and pull all of that information together. I will do some investigating. If I have to have a conversation with the Member on the number of transactions, which I think would actually be almost as large as the tabled document of contracts over \$5,000, I will do some investigating. I will have a conversation with the Member.