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'No' vote for Minister Louis Sebert

Legislative assembly's midterm vote shows majority of MLAs lack confidence in justice minister



Members of the legislative assembly cast their ballots in a secret, non-binding vote on their confidence in cabinet ministers, during Thursday's midterm review. - Kirsten Fenn/NNSL photo

Kirsten Fenn
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SOMBA K'E/YELLOWKNIFE

The ballots have been cast and the results show the majority of MLAs do not have confidence in Louis Sebert as a cabinet minister.

Those were the results of a secret vote held at the end of Thursday's midterm review of cabinet members and the premier's performance - the first to take place since the 12th assembly.

While the votes are non-binding, the expectation of many regular MLAs was that a minister who received a non-confidence vote would step down from their position.

However, that's not how things were unfolding yesterday evening.

"I think all cabinet members have performed and worked very hard," Premier Bob McLeod told media following the announcement of the results. "I can't force anyone to resign. They can only be replaced by a motion of revocation."

Early in the day - which involved nearly nine hours of speeches, questioning and short breaks in between - cabinet ministers unanimously declared they would not

resign from their executive roles if handed a vote of non-confidence.

Their statements came in response to a question from Hay River North MLA R.J. Simpson, who boldly asked whether cabinet would step aside or defy the secret vote and force members to remove them.

"If I get a vote of non-confidence, I would want to see who actually believes that I need to step down," said Caroline Cochrane, minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. "To step down is not what I came for."

Many ministers shared the sentiment, stating they would want a public vote if members were to ask they be ousted from cabinet.

"The only way to remove somebody from executive council is for an open, public vote in this assembly," said Health Minister Glen Abernethy, who stated there are established protocols for removing individuals from the assembly.

Given that, he wouldn't resign either. He'd work with members to make improvements "and hopefully be able to do a better job moving forward," said Abernethy.

Robert C. McLeod, who is responsible for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, as well as the Department of Finance, stated he would not step down either.

Resigning based on a secret vote "would go against what we've been talking about for the last two years," he said, referring to work to improve government transparency.

Sebert, the transparency minister himself, agreed.

He said he had concerns about the "secretive nature of the vote we are facing today" from early on.

"Therefore, no, I would not resign," Sebert said.

But regular MLAs were not pleased by cabinet's gesture.

Kam Lake MLA Kieron Testart said he was "shocked" by cabinet's declaration while Yellowknife North MLA Cory Vanthuyne said he was "troubled" by cabinet's solidarity, as it was his understanding everyone had independence.

"When the question was put to the premier later, about how shall he direct cabinet to vote when it comes to this," said Vanthuyne, "he kind of shed a light on the fact that cabinet takes the position of solidarity and, if not, it could cause anarchy."

He said it was too early for him to say whether members would take steps to remove Sebert when MLAs begin the third session of the 18th assembly in just over a week.

However, Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green expects members to do so.

"Having gone through this process, we need to see it through to the end," said Green. "Otherwise, it's kind of been meaningless."



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