

JULIE GREEN—MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
Aurora College
Committee of the Whole—2018-2019 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Education, Culture and Employment—February 21, 2018

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, my questions have to do with Aurora College. As we all know, there's the foundational review going on of Aurora College, and it is scheduled to wrap up at the end of March. I have some questions about timing around other things that relate to it. For example, at what point will the staff in the teacher education program and the social work program be given layout notices vis-a-vis the completion of this study? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Moses.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Currently, there are no layoff notices that are associated with this foundational review, so I am not sure what the Member is getting at. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister Moses. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to clarify. The Social Work Program and Teacher Education Program enrolments have been frozen. As I understand it, there will be no students going in in September. We have been told that there cannot be any decision about the future of these programs until the foundational review is done, but it seems at some point the college is going to have to make a decision about hanging on to staff who don't have a program to deliver. What is that point? At which point will the Minister be able to either tell people these programs are going to continue or issue the layoff notices? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Moses, to the staff question.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Those are discussions that Aurora College senior management will need to have, and we will be making sure that we have those discussions with them and how they look at redeploying their resources within the Aurora College. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister Moses. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, let me talk about the Social Work Program. It is the one of those two programs I am more familiar with. The people who are teaching the Social Work Program have expertise in social work. They cannot be redeployed to, say, heavy equipment or personal care worker. What I don't understand is when these people are going to be told whether they have a future at the college or not. I am sure there are some collective agreement considerations there. When will these people know whether they have a job with the college or not? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Moses.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. At the onset of discussion on these two

programs, we always said that we would support our students that are in the programs to completion of the programs and then supporting them once it is done, whether they want to look at going into a career or further studying in those programs. Staff at the Aurora College are also doing that support. I am sure that senior management over at the Aurora College is having those discussions with their staff currently. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister Moses. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: We are talking about the instructors. This is the second year of a two-year program. There was no intake this year. These people are going to be finishing their second year, and that is the end of the Social Work Program, as there are no new students in this program. At what point is the Minister going to decide whether this program is going to be reinstated or whether the staff are going to be laid off? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Moses.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. At the onset of discussions with these programs, it was brought to us that the Social Work Program itself was the one that was looking at being slowly phased out. Those were discussions at the time with the board as well as the staff at the Aurora College, and so the Social Work Program that is currently at the Aurora College is not going to be reinstated. However, I do understand that the Aurora College has undertaken a review of that program as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister Moses. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the Minister makes it sound like this program woke up one day and decided to phase it out. The Minister told us in this House that he made the final decision on phasing this program and the Teacher Education Program out. It was not the choice of the program to phase it out or the choice of the instructors or of the students. It is my understanding that he has the final say here. At what point will he be making a decision about the future of this program and the staff who currently are employed by it? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Moses, to the continuance of the program and the staff.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There were recommendations that were brought to me. I had to make the decision on them, and that decision was made early on in this government. The foundational review is still in place. We are waiting to get the report back before we look at making the management response. As I mentioned earlier with the staff, I am sure that senior management over at Aurora College is having those discussions with their instructors as we go through this process. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister Moses. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I am aware that there is a separate evaluation of the Social Work Program going on. In the event that this evaluation chose the program as worthwhile, will the Minister fund its reinstatement? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Moses.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I cannot make that commitment until we do see a report in front of us and a report from the Aurora College. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister Moses. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Mr. Chair, thank you. What I am most concerned about is that, because this program is being starved of students, the staff will soon find other jobs, because they are not going to be able to wait for all of the wheels of government to turn ever so slowly to decide their fate. My concern is that these decisions will not be made in a way that is timely enough for the staff to stay in their positions. Does the Minister share this concern? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Moses.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Of course, we care about all of our employees throughout the whole government. As I mentioned, those discussions I am sure are happening between the senior management over at the Aurora College and their current staff.

In terms of students in the Social Work Program, or social workers in general or educators, we continue to support students who are taking education as well in Social Work Programs in other jurisdictions, and we continue to support them and bring them back to the Northwest Territories here to work. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister Moses. Ms. Green, one more question.

MS. GREEN: Thank you. We heard at some point last year that there was an Aurora College Accountability Framework that was being developed in testing. What is the status of that project vis-a-vis the foundational review? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister Moses.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As this foundational review is coming to completion and we will get getting that report, the accountability framework will be guided by some of the feedback that we have also received through this foundational review. Thank you, Mr. Chair.