

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 221-18(3): ROLE OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN COUNCIL

March 7, 2018

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think, on every other International Women's Day I have ever spent in Yellowknife, I have attended the Bread and Roses lunch and there has been an announcement of the Wise Women Award winners. I note that is not happening today. I have some questions about the status of the Status of Women Council, the body that usually organizes the Bread and Roses lunch and the Wise Women Awards. Can the Minister update us about the status of the Status of Women Council and why they may not have been able to host these events this year? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister responsible for the Status of Women.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Northwest Territories Status of Women is kind of at an arm's length of the Legislative Assembly. Although I, as the Minister of the Status of Women, appoint the board of directors and can take them out of their seats as board of directors, they have a little bit of flexibility in what they do. They are mandated within the Legislative Assembly to incorporate the act, to adhere to the act, to do the tasks that are defined within the act. Part of that act states that they will do gender-based analysis and support the Minister in reaching the Minister of the Status of Women's objectives, which in this case is the mandate about women in leadership.

Traditionally, they have done the Wise Women Awards on an annual basis. We are trying to move in a new direction, though. I am just going to put it out there, Mr. Speaker. There has been a change of administration. There have been some new board members who have come. Old board members have finished their terms, so we put new board members in. I did talk to them the other day about their purpose and their defined role within the act, which is a legal obligation, about their necessity, their purpose. Part of that is, like I said, to do gender-based analysis. The Wise Women Award, though, is not part of the act. It is not something they are mandated to do.

They have taken nominations. When I met with them the other day, they are stating that, because of the organizational changes at this time, they won't be able to do it on this date. They will recognize the Wise Women coming up in the future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the Minister's answer. I have learned a whole load of things. I know that recently the Status of Women executive director resigned. Can the Minister tell us when new staff will be in place?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: The appointment of the executive director is not under my authority. I only delegate the board of directors. In discussing the position with the board of directors, they have informed me that they have completed interviews and they have found a successful candidate. I can't state when they are going to be starting their

position, but I do know that they have selected a new executive director. We are all looking forward to the changes that this new person will bring.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister for that answer. If the Status of Women Council's role is not to promote the accomplishments of women through the Wise Women Awards, as one example, what is the role of the Status of Women Council going forward?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: It is not that Status of Women can't promote women by doing such things as the Wise Women Awards, the Take Back the Night, the December 6th Vigil. Those are important things for women. Those are things that they choose to do on their own in their work to promote women's concerns within the Northwest Territories. Their primary role, though, Mr. Speaker, is to enact the legislative requirements within the Status of Women Act, so that is their primary role. We are trying to move there.

I do want to say that my vision of them, I met one of the new board members that I appointed actually is an old board member, and so she brought me some history which is really important to know. She talked of a time, and I know it was over a decade, but she talked of a time when she was a board member originally, and they had a different executive director, and they were seen on national boards. They were bringing the voice of women to the forefront. They were invited to the table to bring their concerns forward. I think we've lost that, Mr. Speaker. We are trying to work together as a board and the Minister of Status of Women to regain that strength, to regain that voice. They are representatives of all regions of the Northwest Territories, so it's important that we refocus our energies and look at bringing forward the voices of women from the Northwest Territories at a territorial, a local, and a national level.

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

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the Minister for that answer. The Minister said a couple of times that the Status of Women Council needs to return to its purpose as set out in the legislation. Could she just refresh my memory of what that purpose is? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: It's been actually quite a while since I've read the act, although I had read it previously a number of times. The biggest things that stick out for me, though, is the gender-based analysis. They are to be looking at all government departments, territorial departments, and looking at it through a gender-based view to see how they impact women, their policies, because some policies do affect women and people of diversity differently than men. That is one of the main purposes.

The other thing that sticks out in my mind is that they are accountable, they are to support the Minister of the Status of Women. I don't have a department, Mr. Speaker. I am kind of alone in this and we have a lot to do. The Status of Women is my department. They are to help me as the Minister of Status of Women to make sure that the mandates defined within the Legislative Assemblies are moved forward. I need them to help me with that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.