

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 239-18(3): ROLE OF STATUS OF WOMEN COUNCIL

**QUESTION 246-18(3):
ROLE OF STATUS OF WOMEN COUNCIL IN CAMPAIGN SCHOOLS**

March 12, 2018

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women. As I mentioned in my statement, the Status of Women Council's strategic plan doesn't anticipate the changes the Minister is now fronting, yet it was created in her term. Why has she now decided to make these changes? Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by clarifying. When I was asked questions the other day on the Status of Women, if there was anything in my statement that said that I was going to ask the Status of Women to go against the legislative act, then I sincerely apologize because it is important, as members of the public, that we do not lie in the House. I don't remember making that statement. I will check Hansard. If I did, I will apologize in advance. I hope that other Members will, as well.

I don't plan on changing the mandate of the Status of Women, Mr. Speaker. What I plan to do with the Status of Women is bring them back to making sure that they work within the legislative act, to make sure that they are actually representing the act, which is what they were formed for. Why they are working on the new strategic plan is because, for many years, the Status of Women has said they don't have enough money to get to the communities to get the voices.

I met with them a couple of weeks ago, and we talked about reviewing the budget to see about how they can actually bring the voices of women to the table, because that is really important. That is what they are regional representatives for. It is not that they are changing a way that they are going to do something that is different. I want to bring them back, Mr. Speaker, to the purpose of the Status of Women, which is enacting the Status of Women Council Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: I have had the opportunity to review both the act and the strategic plan. I am unclear how the board is not currently enacting the act. Could the Minister explain?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: There are things they are doing that fall within the Act. There are things within the act that say they may do. There are some basic pieces within the act that we need to get back to, like I was saying.

It is right that it doesn't say gender-based analysis, but section 3(1)(e) within the Status of Women Council Act says that the council's purpose is to review policies and legislation affecting women and to report its finding to the relevant government departments or agencies. When I, Mr. Speaker, look at reviewing policies and

legislation on things that affect women, again, I may be incorrect, but my interpretation of the act -- and the act is about interpretation -- says that that is gender-based analysis; so I want to bring them back to that.

Another piece of the act, section 3(1)(f), says: "To provide assistance to the Minister in promoting changes to ensure the attainment of equality of women." Section 3(1)(d): "To advise the Minister on issues that the Minister may refer to the council for consideration."

I hate to bring this out in public, but it is in public. When I did meet with them, I talked to them about my need to meet with them. For the last couple of years, I have been asking them to meet with me. They only had two meetings in Yellowknife, and each time they have had the meetings, they have been during session, which has made it really difficult for me to actually meet with them, except to go in and do a welcoming speech at lunch. They haven't been able to meet after session hours.

I did speak with them the other day and said that we need to have a face-to-face meeting, at least four hours. I am not sure how we can work together, the Status of Women Council and the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, if we can't meet in two years.

Mr. Speaker, I apologize for bringing this public, but it is in the public, and so that is what I want to do. I want to sit with them, regain back their original mandate, make sure that they are following the act, and make sure that we support each other as best as possible.

MS. GREEN: As I said in my statement, the Minister, of course, can ask the council for advice, including gender-based analysis.

Let's take a couple of these changes and break them down. Can the Minister confirm that the Wise Women Awards were not offered this year because the council is no longer eligible for the pot of funding that funded them?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: That is totally incorrect. From my understanding, the Status of Women did put out nominations. It closed in February; I am not sure of the exact date. They stated that they couldn't do the awards because of financial limitations. Those are things that we are looking at within their budget. As stated before, they are looking at their budget to see how they can best provide the services that they need to provide for that.

We do have a pot of funding. It is a small pot. It is \$50,000 a year. The Status of Women never applied for that this year, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't that they couldn't get the money; you need to apply on the money to obtain the money.

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

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the clarification from the Minister. My last question on this is we have recently had a couple of successful campaign schools. They were organized by the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs, and I understood that this was the case because the Status of Women currently is very short-staffed. Can the Minister confirm that the move of the campaign schools to government,

in the form of Executive and Indigenous Affairs, is only temporary? Mahsi.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: The move to bring it into government at this point actually wasn't because of any animosity or any other reason. The reason was because the previous campaign schools for women that were done focused on just the Legislative Assembly.

It was when we did the first workshop during my term in Hay River that it was quickly realized that, if we focused just on the Legislative Assembly, we were defeating our purpose. There were a lot of women who didn't want to run for it because they had childcare issues; they didn't want to do the amount of travelling; they didn't want to leave their communities; they had obligations; a host of reasons.

We decided to expand our campaign schools. We decided that it was important for women in leadership not only to be here. That would be my ideal, to have equal representation, but leadership isn't only in the Legislative Assembly. We needed to look at municipal governments. We needed to look at Aboriginal governments. We needed to look at even education authorities. All elected positions needed to be considered; so we took it internally, just for the short term, to look at actually how we can meet all of those components.

At this point, we are still evaluating. We have just done our new deliveries with it. We will be evaluating the program, and then we will be deciding where we go forward with that. Mr. Speaker, my job is to support the Status of Women Council; the Status of Women Council's is to support me as Minister of Status of Women. I want to work closely with them. We just need to make sure that the campaign school is meeting the needs of residents, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**QUESTION 246-18(3):
ROLE OF STATUS OF WOMEN COUNCIL IN CAMPAIGN SCHOOLS**

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I have a few more questions for my colleague, the Minister responsible for the Status of Women. I heard her say that the campaign schools were being offered by the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs in the short term. I'm wondering if she has prepared over the long term to commit to taking the campaign schools back to the Status of Women and asking them to re-tool the content so that it reaches people who are running for all orders of government? Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As stated earlier, we are just in the stage of renewing it and making it fit the people more appropriately. We will be doing an evaluation at that point, where we will be deciding what we are going to do with it. I also want to say, though, that we are looking at expanding it so that it can meet more of the needs of people and addressing municipal Indigenous governments, for example, but also the budget, we want to make sure that we can do it the most cost-effective way to be able to reach the most communities. It's important. These are important schools. They actually make a difference in women's lives. We are looking at it from not only one aspect, but from many aspects.

Once we are finished that work, I would be more than interested to work with the Status of Women to actually see if they can take this on again because, as I have stated many, many times, my understanding is that the Status of Women has a defined role and part of that is supporting the Minister of the Status of Women. It would be just logical, Mr. Speaker, that they would assist me in that work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the Minister's answer. Where I'm coming from is that I think, as a matter of principle, we don't want civil servants to train future politicians. We want that to happen at arm's length. The Status of Women has have lots of experience in this area, and I think that, once they are back up to speed, they should be the go-to group.

Now, there was a review of the campaign schools in 2017. It has never been made public. Can the Minister commit to making it public?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I won't make that commitment at this time. I need to go back and look at it. The review that we did was internal, and it wasn't actually done under my direction. It was just an employee who offered to assist us with that, so I have to go back and look at it to determine if that was a formal report or was that just a volunteer who was assisting us with looking at making the campaign school better, so I'm not sure if it was a paid position or just a volunteer.

MS. GREEN: To refresh the memory of the Minister, this work was undertaken by a member of the Department of Executive. She was the paid government employee working on the evaluation of the campaign school. I wonder if the Minister could take that into account when she's asking the question of her staff about making the report public?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Absolutely, I will take that into consideration. I just want to note that a lot of people who work for the government actually have a real concern. They want more women in leadership. My understanding, and I will check on that because I may be wrong, is that the majority, I think all of them except for my special advisor, actually were not paid for any of the work that they have done for the campaign schools. It's tended to be on the weekends on our own times, so I will confirm if that is true, because it's important to note. If it is not true, I will come back to the speaker and stand up formally and make a formal clarification.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me make a clarification of my own: the evaluation was completed by a by a member of the Department of the Executive Indigenous Affairs. I'm not talking about the staffing at the campaign schools.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering, given the fact that the Minister is encouraging the council, working with the council, directing the council to refocus its role, whether she plans to consult the public about this refocus and whether there will be an opportunity for people to give their views on the Status of Women Council and its mandate? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I think that being accountable to the public and having the most input from the public is advisable. I don't want to make it a public show. What I

will do, though, is I will commit to doing a survey to find out, and hopefully from all residents, but especially for women. This is the Status of Women, so trying to get a gender-based viewpoint on what the women residents and young girls and women residents of the Northwest Territories feel that we should be doing as the Status of Women, I will commit to doing that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.