

**ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE**

**QUESTION 314-18(3): MANDATE OF STATUS OF WOMEN COUNCIL**

**May 29, 2018**

**MS. GREEN:** Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister responsible for the Status of Women. In March, the Minister promised to consult women of the NWT about the new direction she is setting the Status of Women Council by conducting a survey. Where can women find that survey and respond to it? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I did promise to do a survey regarding voices of women. At this point, we have not got that developed yet. I think it is okay to say that my last women's advisor actually decided to move back to her home community about that time, so I just hired a new woman, Elizabeth. I can't think of her last name at this point. So we will be reinstating that work.

**MS. GREEN:** In the meantime, change is afoot at the Status of Women Council. It's worth noting that the Status of Women Council lays out an arm's-length but accountable agency, but I feel the act is being frustrated because key pieces of the council's work have been removed. What is the impetus for this change? What is the council doing wrong?

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** What is the council doing wrong? I have no idea, Mr. Speaker, what is the council is doing wrong. In fact, for the last two years, I have been asking the council to meet with them. The council has only met during session, and I have gone to them when I can meet with them. It is during session, and I have only been able to go in for a lunch hour and say hi and leave to come running right back to session.

I have asked them over the last two years that I want to meet with them. I have given no direction, period, to the Status of Women Council. I know that I have been accused of giving directions, but I have given none. In fact, the only conversation I have had was asking them to have a meeting when it is not in session so I would be able to talk to them about what they were doing and how we could work together, but to this day, that has not happened.

I did phone the president the other day, and she is wanting to meet with me, as well, but to this day, I have given no direction, period, to the Status of Women Council, nor have I met with them, other than to attend a quick dinner before I return to session.

**MS. GREEN:** I am puzzled by that response, because, on March 12<sup>th</sup> in this House the Minister said that she had met with them at that point a couple of weeks ago, and they had been reviewing their budget and so on and so forth. This is all available in Hansard.

Where is this direction coming from, if not from the Minister, to change the mandate or the work of the Status of Women?

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Yes, during one of the dinner events that I went to, I

did tell them at that time that I wanted to meet with them, that I wanted to have at least a four-hour meeting that we could actually talk about the direction and how we could work together. I did meet with them, and like I had said earlier, I also met with them during lunch hours, but it was only a matter of going in, saying a cordial "glad to work with you," and then I had to run back. I don't really consider those actually directional meetings, and nor should I, because it is not my authority to give direction to them.

The honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre actually brought it up to me the other day and stated that she had heard that the Status of Women Council had decided to stop chairing the Family Violence Coalition.

Mr. Speaker, I would never give direction to stop working with the Family Violence Coalition. I am a child of violence, not a slap on the hand, of fists and boots and knives and guns and hospitals and RCMP detachments. I know family violence, I have lived family violence, and I would never stop anyone from addressing that issue.

I called the president because I had concerns, and the president told me. She said that they are looking at a strategic plan. They need to review things because, she said, 75 per cent of their time was donated to just supporting the Family Violence Coalition. That's half a million dollars in funding that we are giving; 75 per cent was going to that. I never gave direction to stop. The council themselves wanted to look into it to see if that is the best use of their resources.

Mr. Speaker, at no point have I given direction to stop. In fact, when the MLA from Yellowknife Centre asked me that a couple of days ago, I replied via e-mail and, actually, in conversation stated that I never gave direction to stop. I do take a little bit of offence that I have been accused of it, because at no time have I ever, nor at no time would I ever, give any direction to stop combatting family violence. We have huge family violence rates in the Northwest Territories. It is an issue we need to deal with.

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

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't question the Minister's commitment to eradicating family violence, but there is a great deal of confusion around who is taking the leadership on this file. The Status of Women Council feels that it is no longer their job. It was their job for 19 years because they are at arm's length, and they are in a unique advocacy role. What is the Minister going to do, then, to put right this issue of the drifting coalition against family violence? Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** As stated, I did phone the president and was asking where the direction came from, recognizing that she does have the authority to direct the council and to direct the staffing, as the speaker for the whole board. Where did the direction come from? That is something that they are looking at.

I did take note that the MLA did state within her opening statement that it is arm's length, and it needs to be arm's length. Our act says that they can advise the Minister on issues, and I can refer them back to the council for consideration. It says that they can provide assistance to the Minister in promoting change to ensure the attainment of equality of women. That's what it states. I can give some support to them. I can ask them to help me. I can ask them to look into things, but at no time do I see in this act

that I can tell them, "This is what you do in your day-to-day in operations." In fact, there are "mays" in this act that say they may do other things.

The Status of Women Council needs to have autonomy so that they can decide what they are doing best with the resources that they have. I can give suggestions, but I will not direct them. They need to be able to do what they want to do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.