

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

**QUESTION 380-18(3)/386-18(3)
AURORA COLLEGE SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM**

October 15, 2018

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. I have called the Minister's attention to the Aurora College foundational review recommendation for the creation of a degree-granting polytechnic, and I am aware that she is now working on that. With the social work program report, the Minister has a thorough road map in hand for creating a degree-granting program at the new polytechnic. Will the Minister use this report to make a start on our course offerings in the new institution? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, yes, once the associate deputy minister for post-secondary renewal is in place, he, she, that person will be responsible for utilizing both the Aurora College foundational review and the internal review on the social work program that was done by the college.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister for that response. Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that there is already a loss of one of the three instructors and that the college is now down to just a handful of students who are finishing up their program. What is the Minister's intention for this program in the meantime, before the review is implemented?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: For this school year, the program is providing support for students who are trying to finish up. Next year, it won't be happening. It's really important to note that the internal review did not just give an outline that says, "Here's to go." It gave options, similar to the Aurora College foundational review. Some of those options were either stay with the program using the University of Regina, looking at other universities so that the credits are more transferable, or doing a standalone university, and each one of those takes time to be able to research them and get them correct.

MS. GREEN: What I am trying to have the Minister answer is: who will be left in the social work program at this time next year? What resources will be allocated to it?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I cannot really identify who will be left in that social work program this time next year. That is an operational decision that will be made by the associate deputy minister for post-secondary renewal when they, that person, assumes their position.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I regret that the Minister has had a full glass of mumbo-jumbo for lunch and we are not getting anywhere with trying to understand how to preserve the strengths of this program within the time that is still

allotted to it. It's not too late to have the remaining staff start working on how the implementation of the reports' recommendations could happen, and so what is standing in the way of this? It cannot be the hiring of this associate deputy minister. He is working at too high a level to start worrying about which elective social work students are going to be taking. So, once again, I would like to know from the Minister what she is going to do to preserve the strengths of the program in the short term. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: It is well-known that my degree is also in social work, and I have a personal commitment. The Social Work Program is also identified in our Skills4Success in the top 10 positions in the Northwest Territories coming up, but I need to put aside my personal biases. This needs to be a review that is done by the person who is the expert, and that will be the associate deputy minister of post-secondary renewal.

There are things, yes. The current staff that are in the Social Work Program can help with program curriculum, but can they build the relationships with universities across Canada? Is that the role of a professor, to go about and look at the different universities, the different options, and then decide the best path forward? I beg to differ, Mr. Speaker. I believe that is a higher-level position, to be able to build those relationships.

Both reviews, both the Aurora College foundational review and the social work review said, "Build relationships with post-secondary educations." That is the first step. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

QUESTION 386-18(3):
AURORA COLLEGE SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm quite frustrated with the responses from the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment about the social work program. Mr. Speaker, it was a political decision to cut that program based on the government's decision that we needed to have extensive budget cuts in the first two years of our mandate. On that basis, Aurora College was told to cut programs. They cut the social work program. Now, the Minister is not making a political decision to reinstate it. She's hiding behind the bureaucracy and saying that it's up to them to restore it. So my question for the Minister is: this is a question of political will. Do you have the political will to reinstate the social work program? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the political will to make sure that we have quality programming for our students based on the credited standards. I have the political will to know that the social work program and the Bachelor of Education program are in our top 10 needed skills within the Territories in the next 15 years. I have the political will, Mr. Speaker, therefore, to tell the person who takes the position, as I've stated many times in the House, that the first programs to be reviewed within the context of the Aurora College is the social work and the degree in education. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: I wonder what the Minister thinks will be left of that social work program by the time she hires her expert and the expert comes up with a plan and an evaluation

that has already done is redone. What will be left of the program that is there today?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: What I'm hoping will be left when this is done is that we will keep the strengths that are offered within the social work program currently and also address the weaknesses that have been identified in both reports.

MS. GREEN: The thing that I find difficult to understand is: what of those strengths will be left in a year from now? For sure, it's going to take a year. Things move very slowly in government, I've learned. So what will be left of the strengths of this program to preserve by the time the new person gets around to working on the social work program?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: One of the greatest strengths within the program that was identified in the internal review was that it takes a northern context; taking people on the land, bringing others, et cetera. That will be there because, Mr. Speaker, thanks to a previous Minister of Education who was really focused on language and culture, we have language and culture programming throughout our education system, including our post-secondary. So I can't take credit for that. I do have to give credit where it was deserved. That was a previous Minister, Minister Lafferty, I believe, at the time, and so we will make sure that the strongest component, that it is culturally based, will remain.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister for her response. Of course, it's not what I want to hear because it lacks the specificity of telling students who are interested in social work and instructors who are teaching social work that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Ever since this upheaval was created by the previous Minister by implementing cuts at Aurora College, the goal posts just keep moving and moving. We have to wait for the review; we have to wait for the management response; now, we're waiting for an expert. So I really encourage the Minister to expedite the response to the program evaluation and the retooling of the social work program as soon as possible. Will it happen in the life of this Assembly? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Yes, like I said many times, as soon as that person is in place, the first priority of all the evaluations is to be the social work program and the degree in education; that will be a priority. So, yes, that evaluation had better happen in the life of this Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.