

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

**QUESTION 532-18(3):  
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES WAIVER FOR EMPLOYEES  
CROSSING A PICKET LINE**

**February 8, 2019**

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Finance. In a communique issued to the unionized work force in July of last year, he said, and I quote, "You would not be able to return to work during the strike to perform other unionized work." My question for the Minister is: why did this position change? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Masi. Minister of Finance.

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the Member could explain a little further, I am not sure what has changed with the communique going out that, if folks wanted to return to work, then they would not be asked to do other tasks that are not within their own personal job description. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. GREEN:** Let's fast forward now to Tuesday when the Minister said in this House, and I quote, "I think that this is one of these situations where we show due respect on both sides of the table, and we hope that would bring the temperature down." Imagine my surprise when I saw the government waiver that was handed out to unionized workers yesterday. How does that action square with his statement earlier in the week of bringing the temperature down?

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** Obviously, we would like to see things cool down a bit. However, providing information to employees, somebody has to provide employees with information. We have provided them with the information upon a lot of employees' requests about the waiver. If you have read the one from last week, we have encouraged them to speak to their union representatives, and this waiver is part of that process. I don't think it is inflaming anything. It doesn't really matter what we say. At the temperature things are at, nothing is going to calm it down, anyway. This is just providing information, Mr. Speaker. Somebody needs to keep the members of the public service informed.

**MS. GREEN:** I would like to provide the Minister of Finance with some information: it is further inflaming the situation. I don't understand what the government is thinking they are going to accomplish by handing out these forms, except to make everybody more mad. There is a sort of an impugning of intention here that the picket line is going to be aggressive and that there needs to be some kind of indemnification for the government. Does the Minister not see that, in fact, this is fanning the flames, and why would he want to do that?

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** The ministry is not fanning the flames. We are providing information. People want information. They need to know, to have the information to make an informed decision, and they know the consequences of the decision they are

going to make. We need to give them that opportunity. This is just part of the process as we prepare for what we are hoping is not going to happen. We will do our darnedest as we are going into mediation, I told committee that the other night, to reach an agreement.

We have all seen the emails from a lot of people out there who are concerned. There are some emails saying, "Well, that is going to decide where I go on October 1<sup>st</sup>." That is fine. That is part of the process. Every four years, we hear that, but I am hearing from people who are wanting to know, "How am I going to pay my mortgage? How am I going to look after my three children?" We are going to use that as a backdrop as we go into negotiations to try to find a deal that works for them, for us, for the union, and especially for the people in the Northwest Territories. That is what we should be thinking about.

I don't believe we are fanning any flames. We are providing people with information. Members always want information. They stand up, asking me questions, "Can you provide more information?" I say, "Yes." Same situation, we are providing information.

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

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not surprisingly, the Minister and I have a difference of opinion here about providing information that undermines the union's position in ways that are completely unnecessary. They have the right to strike. The norm is for unionized people, they don't have to be on the picket line, but they are not usually welcomed back with open arms for crossing the picket line. I stand by my position that I think that this inflames an already very volatile situation. I would like to know what the purpose is of handing out these waiver forms. What is the purpose? Thank you.

**HON. ROBERT MCLEOD:** Absolutely, the union has a right to strike, and they have served a strike notice. We respect their position. That doesn't mean we have to agree with it, but we respect it. People out there also have a right to go to work, and they have a right to have the proper information to help them make an informed decision. That is all we ask of each other. We want to have the right information to make an informed decision. We are giving them that opportunity. Unfortunately, it might be perceived differently by some, but we have to give people the right to choose. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.