

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

**QUESTION 586-18(3):
HEADQUARTERS FOR NEW POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY**

February 21, 2019

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. In her response to the Aurora College foundational review, the Minister said that the transformation of the college will begin with the creation of an NWT-wide vision of post-secondary education. My question is: isn't the first thing to resolve the issue of where the headquarters and the main campus are going to be located? Masi.

DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, I think that the first thing to do, actually, was to hire the person to actually become the associate deputy minister, would be the first priority, and that is what we focused on. Actually defining where the headquarters are, we spent a lot of time, Mr. Speaker. I went to the three communities, Inuvik, Yellowknife, and Fort Smith, a total of three times. I met with the community counsellors there. I met with public meetings. I spent a lot of time, and I heard clearly, I heard clearly, that students and staff see the benefits of all three communities, and I see the benefits of all three communities, so defining where the headquarters will be is something we need to look at down the road, once we have an implementation plan.

I have committed that the person who will be hired fairly soon, I will be announcing that fairly soon, as well, will be located in Yellowknife, because we have to work very closely together on the planning stage. After that is done, then we will be defining if and where we need a headquarters. At this time, Mr. Speaker, all three communities have stated very clearly both orally and in writing that they do not want one community over the other. They want, as my vision was, three strong communities and three strong campuses.

MS. GREEN: I have no quarrel with the idea of three strong campuses, but I don't understand how the Minister and her staff are going to create an implementation plan when there is not a vision for where the main campus is going to be. I get the idea of three, but I do not think they are going to be equal, so how can she go forward with an implementation plan without knowing where the headquarters is going to be?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Once that person is hired, which I will be announcing, again, later on, the implementation plan will take place at that time. Again, we have committed. I have said that we will take that person, they will be located in Yellowknife so that we can work very closely with them over the next couple of years, but the question still remains, Mr. Speaker: do we need to move every single position out of Fort Smith, at this time, into Yellowknife? Do we need to move the finance? Do we need to move aspects of that? Those are questions we need to look at more in depth. Also, it cannot be about one community over another. I recognize I am an MLA for Yellowknife, but on

top of that I am a Minister for all communities in the Northwest Territories. My commitment is to making sure that all communities are taken care of, and that is why I have said from the beginning and will say till the end: three strong communities, three strong campuses. I will not let one be detrimental to the others.

MS. GREEN: The Minister has been unable to answer my question. At some point, there is going to be a new campus built, and my understanding is it's going to be built in Yellowknife. There is going to be money needed for this, so where along this whole road does the decision get made that there will be a new campus in Yellowknife and that it will be the headquarters for the new polytechnic?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I am a little bit shocked. I am wondering if the MLA has more information than I do, because I didn't know that we were having a new campus in Yellowknife at this time. We are still working with the City of Yellowknife to define if that is a brick and mortar or if it actually is building on what they have already. So those decisions have not been made, and my commitment has been to work very closely with the municipal government to determine that need. Like I said, the first couple of years are around planning, and the definition of what headquarters looks like or where it will be will be future, down the road.

DEPUTY SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I hear is the Minister is punting this decision down the road to the next Assembly so that she is not going to disappoint anyone, but I want to put on the record that this decision is going to have to be made. Whether we are talking about bricks and mortar, whether we are talking about distance learning, whatever it is we are talking about, this thing is going to exist somewhere and the Minister is going to have to make a decision about it, so at a what point is that going to come, if not some future Assembly and some hapless Minister of the day having to make somebody unhappy?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I think that I have been called many things since I have taken this position. However, I have not been called "easy" and I have not been called "lazy," so I am not looking for easy answers out. I am doing my job as a Minister, and that means protecting all people in the Northwest Territories, in all communities. As stated, I see benefits in all three communities. Climate change is affecting our northern communities more so than Yellowknife. Not to say it's not affecting Yellowknife, but it's affecting them more so. Would that not make sense to study there? If we are going to do ENR programs, does it make sense to do them in Yellowknife or does it make sense to do it outside the community? Those are questions we need to look at.

Before we even get to defining what the headquarters looks like, Mr. Speaker, we have to develop a vision. One of the recommendations says we try to do too much for everyone. We need to stop that. We need to look at what we are good at, what we should be specializing in, and what we should be leaving to other universities and polytechnics throughout Canada. So that is the first step, is defining what we need, what we are good at, what we should be focusing our energies on. After that, then we will be looking at the structures of how we support all three communities and all three campuses. Not only the campuses, but the 22 community learning centres also need to

be in that picture, as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.