

JULIE GREEN—MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
Budget Reporting of ECE Funds for Various Programs
Committee of the Whole—2019-2020 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Education, Culture and Employment—March 5, 2019

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we touched on this point before, but I feel a need to go over it on this page. I understood the Minister to say that some of the money that was paying for the new ADM came from the Aurora College fund, and we also know that there were cuts to programs at Aurora College for the Social Work Program and the Teachers' Education Program, and yet the budget doesn't reflect those decreases in spending. Can the Minister explain why that is the case? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The programs for the Social Work Program and the teachers, those were put on hold. We are reviewing them. We have not taken the money away from those programs. Aurora College still has the funding for those. We have not lowered the funding. They are still getting \$32 million a year, so that money is still in place, and, of course, they can use that as needed. The other part was that we had a person that was in a position, and we bumped them up to acting, so we actually have additional staffing monies for that, as well. We are not worried. We do feel that we have the money to provide for the salary.

Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. My deputy minister reinforced that, as we do the implementation plan, as we need money, then we will be coming back with that, so, at this point, we do not see the additional need for monies for that position. If I am wrong, I am willing to make a business case and to approach Cabinet, but, at this point, we are not seeing it. When the implementation plan is done, at that point, through that process, we will see the need for additional funds provided to the polytechnic university. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This isn't making total sense to me. Let's take the Social Work Program. It is my understanding that there is no staff left at the Social Work Program, so I am unclear why those salaries would be budgeted into the next fiscal year. It looks like the effect of this is to create a slush fund that will be sort of unplugged to actual need in the next fiscal year and, in fact, for the foreseeable future, because we don't know when or if the Social Work Program is coming back. Can the Minister provide a rationale for continuing to allocate money to salaries, when there is no one to fill the positions and there is no advertising to fill those positions, because there is no program? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The decision was made not to take the funding away, because we know that we are moving into a polytechnic university, and my commitment on the floor was that those two programs would be the first ones to be reviewed once we do the evaluation. Those positions are still here in the

mains. The people in those positions are not there. They have been transferred, or they have gotten other jobs, but the positions still remain, and that money is actually not being spent until the polytechnic action plan is decided upon. We haven't taken the money away. The people have left, but the money is still there for those positions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I get that the money is still here. I just am questioning, as a budgeting practice, budgeting for a program that doesn't exist. There is X amount of money for these instructors that is not being taken up. The effect of that is there is this money dedicated to a program that no longer exists. I don't understand why the Minister is retaining this money. The whole point of this exercise was for Aurora College to save money. The staff are all gone; there is the possibility of saving the money, and yet, the money is still here for a program that, at this point, doesn't have a start date. I just can't follow the logic of it. If she could speak to me about that, please? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Minister.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Originally, the direction was, if we were leaving those positions, to take the money away. It was a decision that was not favourable, and so we stopped that, and we said, "No, Aurora College will still get the same amount of funding." They have a lot of work to do, Mr. Chair. They need to develop an implementation plan. They need to do an evaluation. They need to look at the programs. That money will still be needed.

When we give funding to all of the schools, we give funding based on enrolment or based on teachers needed or other factors considered, but we don't prescribe what any of the education authorities is actually going to do, down to what your janitor buys or what you implement. That is why we have education bodies to actually do that work. We provide \$32 million to Aurora College, and that money is still there for Aurora College to move into the polytechnic university. They can use that as they deem necessary. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: I am starting to get a little clearer here now. The money is not for the Social Work Program; it is for the development and implementation of the polytechnic university. Do I have that right now? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Minister.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The money is provided to Aurora College for the implementation of their programs as they, Aurora College, deem fit. Now, as we move into the polytechnic university, the person that is responsible for that will use that funding as that person deems fit to provide for the best services for students and to meet the needs of residents and businesses in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess the only thing that I find surprising is that money is allocated for one purpose and used for another. That doesn't seem to be sound business practice, even for an arm's-length organization. I am wondering why that is. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, we provide that money to Aurora College as a contribution and to use as they see fit. They have to provide us an annual report on what they have done with that, but to date, we have never been so prescriptive for the GNWT to say, "You will provide this program, that program, this program, that program." That has always been the autonomy of the post-secondary education.

I am open to feedback if committee thinks that I should be directing the college on what we are doing, but I do think that having that autonomy is the right way to move within our post-secondary education and all education systems. What is the use of decentralizing if we are going to prescribe, "This is you will do with every single cent?" The whole purpose is to actually have the people in the regions or in Aurora College to be able to define how they use their funding to meet their best needs as they deem fit. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I realize that the decision to cut the programs was not made by this Minister, but I find the conversation of autonomy somewhat galling. The college was directed to cut those programs, and they did that. While I appreciate the Minister championing the independence and integrity of Aurora College, the fact is that they have been taking orders from the Department of Education, Culture and Employment for a long time, and we have several studies that show that that is the case. I guess I am still trying to reconcile, "They are a fully autonomous organization," with the evidence that we have that is to the contrary. I realize that there is a lot of this that needs to be worked out in governance, but let me just say that I am a big fan of budgeting where you call the rent "the rent," you call the utilities "the utilities." You don't call the Social Work Program "implementation of a polytechnic university"; you call it what it is. I leave those comments with the Minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Ms. Green. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, I am not a big fan of doing budgeting, either. That is not based on some kind of research, calling the utilities, checking what the enrolments were, checking what the needs are. I am going to make the assumption that Aurora College has done that all themselves. We give them the money as a contribution agreement. They provide their budget and then their annual reports as they deem fit. That has been a luxury. The government response says that we are only going to work with them for a couple of years, and the whole focus is to get them independent, because that is a big critique, that we are too entrenched in them. That is why I have committed to working with them and not doing the implementation plan before I hired the right person. Thank you, Mr. Chair.