

Aurora College Change in Leadership

February 5th 2020

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. It's difficult to make progress toward a goal when project leadership turns over frequently and suddenly. Such is the case with the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university, a project that I support.

In 2017, the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment dismissed the board of directors of Aurora College and replaced them with an administrator. In 2018, the college's president resigned, following a foundational review of the college. The review set the scene for revamping the college by hiring a new president, who would also serve as assistant deputy minister of post-secondary education renewal. Now, the wheels have come off that bus and another new college president has been appointed. I thought that we had entered a period of stable leadership at the college, but I am mistaken. Each year brings its own new leadership.

It's worth remembering, Mr. Speaker, that the GNWT hired a southern head-hunting firm to collect resumes for the president's job. GNWT made the decision to hire Dr. Tom Weegar a year ago. He came with the relevant education and work experience to begin the transformation, the Minister said.

During our last sitting, the current ECE Minister indicated the work was on track, including establishment of an academic advisory council and broad consultation to develop a three-year strategic plan; and here we are, two months later, with another change, a change with no public explanation. This time, however, there was no cross-Canada search for a new president. Instead, there was a quick promotion of an assistant deputy minister of ECE. We haven't been told what his qualifications are for the job. We are left to wonder if he has the relevant qualifications and, if so, why wasn't he appointed to this role in the first place?

Mr. Speaker, I have two other concerns. The first is that the Aurora College Foundational Review made the case for the college's independence from the department. It's hard to see how this goal will be met when the president has been hired from within the department. At the very least, there is the perception that the college and the department continue to work hand in glove, to our detriment.

The second concern is that the president is expected to do two jobs, the other as ADM of post-secondary education. Given the concern I just raised, I wonder if it is feasible to have one person doing both. I will have questions for the Premier. Mahsi.