

MLA JULIE GREEN – YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE – IN THE MEDIA

Aurora College boss says he was fired, despite minister's assertion

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Flatly contradicting the NWT's education minister, the former president of Aurora College says he was pushed out of the position.

Tom Weegar [told NNSL](#) on Wednesday: "My initial reaction was very much surprise. I had no knowledge that the government was interested in letting me go and replacing me. No communication about that whatsoever."

Weegar also [told the CBC](#) he had been removed from his position. Weegar told the broadcaster he asked the territorial government: "Can you tell me why? What was it that led me to lose your confidence?"

He said he was told in response: "Any one of us can go without cause, and this is just one of those circumstances."

Weegar's comments are extraordinary in advancing the exact opposite of the NWT government's account of the same interaction.

I believe someone went to the premier and said something. What that was? Who that was? I have no idea. ***TOM WEEGAR, SPEAKING TO NNSL***

Earlier on Thursday, education minister RJ Simpson [had told Cabin Radio](#): "Tom has said that he wants to step away to pursue other opportunities."

In the legislature, Premier Caroline Cochrane similarly sought to suggest Weegar had not been fired.

"Sometimes you make leadership changes that we don't have notice of," Cochrane told Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green, who had asked why Weegar left the post.

Cochrane added: "To jump to 'shown the door' might not be the terms that I would use."

Cabin Radio has written to the education minister to ask why his account of what happened differs so significantly from that provided by Weegar.

'No cross-Canada search'

Regular MLAs poured scorn on the territory's handling of the situation even before Weegar's side of the story had been heard.

"Now, the wheels have come off that bus and another new college president has been appointed. Each year brings its own new leadership," Green said as the legislature reconvened for a seven-week session.

In particular, she queried why – after a lengthy search for an academic figurehead resulted in Weegar's appointment – his successor was named as Andy Bevan, a bureaucrat promoted from within the Department of Education, Culture, and Employment.

"This time, there was no cross-Canada search for a new president. Instead, there was a quick promotion. We are left to wonder if he has the relevant qualifications," said Green.

In response, Cochrane – alluding to Bevan's work leading an employment initiative named Skills 4 Success – said: "Mr Bevan has a long history of being suitable for this position.

"He took part in some of the polytechnic review. He is very qualified for the position and this is more of an HR issue, so I'll stop at that."

Rylund Johnson, the MLA for Yellowknife North, said: "It saddens me that Aurora College is one of the most costly, and least successful, colleges to run in the country.

"Repeatedly, when I have conversations about this, there is a lack of enthusiasm. I think people are scared.

"Now, we have a president leading this transformation who is a former bureaucrat. I do not believe that is the right path to head down."

Weegar speaks of sabotage

Weegar, speaking to NNSL (he could not be reached by Cabin Radio), said he could not account for why he had been let go – but implied a form of "sabotage."

He said: "I believe someone went to the premier and said something. What that was? Who that was? I have no idea.

"I don't think a premier makes a decision partway through the term and makes a decision like this without some impetus. I'm curious as to what this impetus was."

Speaking to the CBC, he said he had "encountered a real strong resistance to change," adding: "I didn't understand it."

Weegar had been hired in February 2019 to lead Aurora College and, simultaneously, the transformation of the college into a polytechnic university in the next six years.

Julian Morse, a Yellowknife city councillor who has helped to steer the city's response to plans for a new polytechnic university, expressed "curiosity" about Weegar's departure in an interview before either the minister or Weegar had spoken on the matter.

"It was a surprise," said Morse of Weegar's exit. "I'm now looking forward to learning about what this means for what comes next.

"As of right now, I think the City of Yellowknife is paying very close attention. But this really is in the government's hands. I'm very curious to see what the next steps are going to be."