

ORAL QUESTIONS—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

MANDATE LETTERS

December 10, 2019

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the honourable Premier. As I mentioned in my statement, Ministers in the last two Assemblies received mandate letters from the Premier. In fact, the Premier herself would have received her own for her different portfolios. My first question is: how did having a mandate letter help or hinder her? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife Centre. Honourable Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provision of the mandate letters that were provided to me as a Minister in the 18th Legislative Assembly helped to reinforce the priorities and the mandate commitments that were made by all Assembly Members during the 18th Assembly. They kept me focused on the needs, but they did not limit me. I must make that clear. They did not limit me in what my powers were. They gave me a guideline. They said, "You must do these," but I also appreciate that I had the freedom to move the departments as I felt was appropriate, based on the needs of people.

MS. GREEN: My follow-up question is: does the Premier, then, consider the letters to be valuable enough that she will provide mandate letters to her Ministers, and, if so, when can this Assembly expect to see them?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Absolutely. I think that the mandate letters are necessary. They provide a guideline for what I expect from Ministers. They also provide a tool that can be used by the Premier to judge if the Ministers and the departments are complying with the mandates for the Legislative Assembly.

I will continue that process. I had said that before. I will have my own. I know that the mandate will be developed by all of us in this Assembly, taking ownership as Cabinet for the final document, but I have said time and time again during when I was elected and before I was elected that one of the components that I will have is that they work closely with all Members and all stakeholders. That is key to me. We have talked many times about the need to work better, and we are committed as a Cabinet to working better.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Premier for that. My next question was partly anticipated by her last answer. In addition to talking to Ministers about their tasks, what kind of direction will the Premier provide about working with Regular MLAs and, in particular, strengthening the consensus part of consensus government?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Any Member who is sitting in this House today who did not hear very clearly during the candidates' debate who were all vying to become either Premier or Ministers, it was very clearly heard that MLAs were not happy that they did not have a say. The

public, I believe, was not happy that we did not work as closely as we had to. Again, that will be in my mandate letter of expectation from Ministers.

Not everything will be in a mandate letter; it is impossible to do that, but I personally will be holding Ministers and departments to account when they do not provide standing committees and

Regular Members as much information as possible, recognizing that sometimes decisions have to be made in a hurry. Our commitment is that this government is to work as closely and respectfully as possible with the Regular Members.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, honourable Premier. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Premier for that answer. My final two questions are whether there will be any input from Regular Members into the mandate letters and when the mandate letters are expected to be complete. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I'm conscious of time. We began the process of developing the mandate from the list of priorities approximately a month ago. We are still in the draft stage. We are presenting to standing committee again, I believe, on the 14th, and that will be a process. We have committed to tabling our mandate in the next sitting in February. We will abide by that.

My fear is that providing the mandate letters after that will take another two or three months, and so what I am proposing is that Regular Members who have an interest in having some feedback into the mandate letters, aside from the mandate commitments because those will be defined, but if they think that there are areas, then I am more than willing to accept their feedback. They can send them to me. They can walk into my office. I will not commit that I will meet every one of them because that is a decision that has to be made, but I am open to hearing their feedback. In fact, I am soliciting their feedback, is what I am doing at this point.

There are also other chances for Regular Members to have feedback. The mandate letters is one area. The mandate process that we are going through is one area, but we also have main estimates that will be coming up, capital budgets, business plans. During that process, Cabinet Members will be providing to standing committees their projections, their wishes, and standing committee will have time in that to actually give feedback to Ministers, as well, and then, of course, challenging on the floor and Committee of the Whole. The mandate letters, the mandate commitments, are not the only opportunity for Members to have feedback.

I have heard clearly that Members will be holding us to task. Their job is to hold us to task and keep us accountable, so I expect that to come forward throughout this Legislative Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, honourable Premier.