

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 176-19(2): NORTH SLAVE CORRECTIONAL CENTRE ASSAULT

March 10, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a few more questions for my friend, the Minister of Justice. I just want to go back to the workplace safety assessment. Can the Minister tell us who is doing this assessment and who the results will be reported to? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Justice.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had confirmed quite specifically that it was an external contractor, external to the Department of Justice, but I don't have the name. I will have to confirm that. I would expect that it would come back to me. As far as releasing it thereafter, I would first of all need to know the extent of it. To the extent that it's a specific HR matter, I would be hesitant to release names that are involving HR. To the extent that it's a broader assessment, I expect that that can much more generally be released to the relevant committee. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the answer from the Minister. I just want to inform the Minister that, in times gone by, we have received reports confidentially as a standing committee, and we've committed to keeping those reports confidential. I am concerned, in the meantime, about the safety of the staff in the North Slave Correctional Centre. The findings from that report into the incident last May suggest that the guard may not have been aware of the protocol he wasn't following, and he put himself into a very unsafe situation. My question for the Minister is: what specific additional measures can Corrections management take to keep their front-line staff safe?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: I certainly share the view that making sure that all staff at Corrections facilities across the Northwest Territories are safe is critical. I certainly am aware of the need to do that and aware of the challenges of working in the Corrections environment. I have seen and am aware from just my involvement in the correctional area that this is something that we need to be constantly vigilant about. Leaving aside this specific incident and the specific individuals involved, when I assumed this role, it was something that I was alive to and did, indeed, take action to establish the interdepartmental working group between Human Resources and Corrections in order to ensure that appropriate training is unfolding; that tracking of training, both in terms of the correctional side of training, as well as mental wellness and wellness generally, are all taking place within the facility. There is now a work plan for that working group. They are looking at appropriate training for people within

Corrections. They are assuring me that, indeed, tools and resources have been developed and are being developed that look at, within correctional institutions, mental wellness and wellness generally are going to be available and, more specifically, that there is going to be Corrections-relevant training worked in that has a northern context and northern relevance. That is going to be part of all training delivered for new recruits going forward in the Northwest Territories. I appreciate these questions. It is something that I think deserves significant attention, and I can certainly assure the Member that, as I have said, there have been a number of things changed already and things that are going to continue to change and roll out over the next few months.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the Justice Minister's comprehensive answer to my question. To follow up, I wonder how many front-line staff at North Slave Correctional Centre are away on stress leave or are being accommodated because they are unable to do their original job, because of this incident or other like it?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: I will commit to getting a specific number to the Member. I don't have it offhand. I can acknowledge that, not only in our correctional facilities but in Corrections across Canada, there have been increases in the number of individuals who are off work as a result of psychological wellness, psychological injury. That is a growing concern. I am assured, somewhat fortunately, although there is work to be done, that Corrections staff are engaged on a national level with their counterparts to consider this issue, to consider what can be done to better support Corrections staff in the Northwest Territories and in Canada generally, knowing that this is something that has become a bigger and bigger issue, and we are going to need to take steps to deal with it. As I have said, there are some efforts already under way with the inter-departmental working group, looking specifically at mental wellness, and we will continue to be looking for best practices from our counterparts across Canada.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Final supplementary, Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I thank the Justice Minister for her very comprehensive answer. I understand that the assault last May was unusual in its viciousness, but there are assaults fairly often within the North Slave Correctional Centre and in correctional centres generally, so I'm wondering whether the Minister knows or could find out whether there have been additional assaults since the incident last May? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: I am assuming that the Member is referencing assaults on staff. Seeing that that is correct, I will find out whether or not there have

been any further incidents involving assaults on staff and, in doing so, try to determine what responses there have been or investigations that may have taken place. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.