

**ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE**  
**QUESTION 306-19(2): Changes to Public Health Orders and the Border**

**June 9, 2020**

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Premier. Throughout the pandemic, the Regular Members have struggled to receive timely, complete, accurate, and fulsome information about different aspects of the government's reaction to the pandemic.

Once again, we have done our major learning from the news sources: first CBC, and then Cabin Radio. What we now know is that the public health order is going to be changed. I am unclear, first of all, why this wasn't announced in an orderly way, meaning a news release with advance notice to the Regular MLAs and a news release that is released to the public. What we have now is a really confusing mishmash. What was the thinking behind the way this news was released? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I first want to state that the Chief Public Health Officer has the autonomy in order to make orders, and it is really important that, in the act, it says that people can't interfere with her orders. We have to be very careful, as politicians, that we are not imposing on her and making her feel pressured within that. We have been meeting with her as regularly as possible and talking to her about our concerns.

Mr. Speaker, our Chief Public Health Officer is not a politician. She is trying her best to protect the safety of people. She has made commitments, and I think that sometimes, when she is on the media, she kind of gets caught off. I get caught off. I have been in this House for four and a half years, and I still get caught off-guard. I can't blame her for that. The idea was that it was supposed to go to standing committee on Thursday. I think that we are still scheduled to present to standing committee on Thursday, and then it would come out, but she did get hit off-guard by the media, and so she did say that new orders would be coming out. She hasn't defined what they would look like yet, and so I am hoping that that will be shared with the Regular Members on Thursday when we meet with them.

I do apologize if communications aren't as we wanted it to be. Again, we are all still learning within this process. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you to the Premier for that response. I am not talking about the CPHO or challenging her autonomy. The remarks were remarks that you made on CBC and then were quoted by Cabin Radio. It's nothing to do with the CPHO.

I am still not clear why this has all been advanced in a way that has created a lot of confusion. For example, what the Health Minister just indicated is not what was in the remarks from yesterday. It indicates that there are still going to be restrictions, that, although there will not be

any limit on mobility rights, you still have to fit within these specific classifications in order to come here. What can the Premier do, Mr. Speaker, in order to clarify the situation before Thursday?

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thursday is coming up pretty fast, but if the Member wanted to meet with me after session, I am more than willing to meet. You can give me a call any time. Again, I apologize if it was my comments on CBC. This issue with the border and mobility rights is something that we have been discussing in Cabinet for the last little while. It is an issue. We didn't really come to any firm conclusion. We were just talking about up right until, actually, this morning, we were still talking about this issue.

The Chief Public Health Officer did come out and say that there was going to be a change. When I do media, Mr. Speaker, I would really love if the media just gave me all their questions in advance, and I could be preparing all the answers, but that isn't my reality. Often, they will say that they are going to ask me questions, and then the questions come. For example, today, I did a media this morning, and they asked me four questions that were just totally irrelevant to each other. That is how media works. I do apologize if sometimes I don't give the notice that I should. I will try to get better in the future.

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you to the Premier for that answer. It is my understanding that this isn't a CPHO order at all. This is something that was decided by Cabinet and that, in fact, the borders are not fully open. They are only open to certain types of travel. The Health Minister just said that leisure travel is prohibited, so that means that people who were planning to come here as tourists are no longer going to be allowed to come here. This is the source of the confusion when it comes out in dribs and drabs through the media.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Again, we are trying to work closer with our Chief Public Health Officer. Oftentimes, orders will come out, and we are still trying to figure out what that means for us, as well. The border closing wasn't something that was actually designed by Cabinet. That was something that we were looking at the order and deciding, because we have a challenge about the mobility aspect.

If you look at the Public Health Act, under section 11.1(b), it says the Chief Public Health Officer, and excuse me if I paraphrase, may make any order that they consider necessary to protect public health. If, in the opinion, on reasonable grounds, that the order is necessary to decrease or eliminate the health hazard -- sorry, I was reading the wrong part. In 33.1, during the state of public health emergency, the Chief Public Health Officer may, (d), make orders and provide direction restricting travel to or from any area within the NWT.

The order was made by the Chief Public Health Officer. Cabinet was trying to talk about what that order meant. Again, on the legal advice, not recommendation advice that we had gotten, we were discussing what that meant about making orders within the NWT. Those were the discussions that the Cabinet table; it wasn't the orders of the Chief Public Health Officer.

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

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Premier for that answer. Mr. Speaker, I would like to challenge the Premier to have a news conference tomorrow with the Chief Public Health Officer to explain all of this to the people of the Northwest Territories. Thursday is, in fact, still two business days away, and I really feel that we need this clarity now about who can and can't come, who is paying for the self-isolation, when this is going to take effect, and so on. I would appreciate the Premier making that commitment. Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** I think that all of us in this House would like clarification on the orders and how they stand. I can't commit to having a press release on it tomorrow. The reason is because there are many Ministers. It's myself, my schedule; the Minister of Health will be there, her schedule; and the Chief Public Health Officer. We did make arrangements already. Our press release will be on Friday. It is already scheduled. At that time, we will be answering any questions and clarifying the new orders as they come forward, and I suspect that we will get questions on the border and hopefully clarify that, as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.