

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 353-18(2): MINISTERIAL DIRECTIVE ON ENROLMENT OF STUDENTS IN FRENCH FIRST LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

October 19, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: [Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have some questions for the Minister of Education today, but I want to speak English. [Translation ends.] I do this in English, and I did want to give the Minister a fair heads up as well. Earlier today I spoke today about the Francophone community's lack of support for the new ministerial directive on student enrolment in French first language schools. Can the Minister of Education explain why he did not collaborate more closely with CSFTNO and APADY and share a draft of the Ministerial directive with these organizations before it was finalized and released? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the consultation period we heard from many stakeholders. We had public engagements here in Yellowknife as well as Hay River. The information that we received, our jurisdictional scan, as well as looking at our policies we thought we were moving ahead; that the ministerial directive was good in the way it was presented. It is better than the 2008 ministerial directive. There is improvements and we did get consultation and engagements with community groups here in Yellowknife as well as Hay River. Moving forward, we thought that was a good process. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I do appreciate the response from the Minister and his work on this issue. Unfortunately, in the Yukon their directive was released just less than a couple of weeks later and headed that territory off in a much different direction, and a more collaborative one. So we had received communications from CSFTNO, a letter dated September 6, 2016 with comments on the directive and requesting changes to it. So will the Minister commit to reopen those discussions with CSFTNO and APADY and find a more workable directive?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: CSFTNO were part of the consultation processes, the engagements. As I mentioned in my Minister Statement earlier, we did get three applications that under the new directive they were allowed into the school under the acquisition portion and, as I mentioned as well, that both schools are both French first-language schools are under the utilization rates, and actually we're building on the one here in Yellowknife that will address the enrolments and the utilization rate there. We actually went above and beyond in terms of putting two classrooms on top of that to address the enrolment rate should more admissions go into the ESC in future years.

MR. O'REILLY: I appreciate the efforts of the Minister, as I said before, but I don't think he actually answered my question. There's been communications now from CSFTNO, specifically about the ministerial directive with corrections to the jurisdictional scan that was prepared and raising comments and concerns around the directive. Does the Minister actually intend to respond to that communication and has he opened up further discussions to improve and set that directive off in the right direction again?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, and I apologize to the Member. I just gave the information in terms of why we're not going to revisit the ministerial directive, because the enrolment rates were low, a lot of engagements and consultations went on already. In terms of the continued

work forward and the letter, we did have to translate all the jurisdictional scan information, we got that done, and we will be responding to CSFTNO and APADY with our response as well.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear that the Minister does intend to respond to the letter from CSFTNO. But if I heard him correct, I think he said that he's not willing to reopen the directive. That would be extremely unfortunate, Mr. Speaker.

So I just wonder then, how does the Minister propose to develop a better working relationship with APADY and CSFTNO for French-first language education in the NWT so we don't end up back in the courts? That's what we all want to avoid. So I think the community's pleading for some flexibility to get us more towards what they have in the Yukon. Can the Minister provide some assurance to this House and the public that he's willing to re-examine the directive and get us off in a better direction? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: That's where we don't want to end up again is in the court house and then have a court order against the government. We did get that court order, we appealed it, CSFTNO appealed it, we're going with what was in the court order to provide what was needed. As I mentioned, we are going above and beyond to add those two new school rooms. A lot of engagement was done. I do believe that we're building a stronger relationship with the French community throughout the Northwest Territories to address some of their concerns.

I committed, when I took this position, to review the ministerial directive, I did that. I think it's better than what it was when we first started this government. When we get to those utilization rates and to prevent us from going to the court room, as I said, they're below utilization right now, then perhaps we can look at revisiting it then.