

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Aurora College Strategic Planning and Accountability Framework
Committee of the Whole—2017-2018 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Education, Culture and Employment—February 20, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I think I heard the Minister say tomorrow; is that correct? Okay, great.

My next question is I believe it's in the business plan that there's some mention of an accountability framework being developed for Aurora College. Can the Minister or his staff tell me a little bit more about what that accountability framework is all about? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Deputy Minister Haener.

MS. HAENER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the request for the mandate letter, and I don't want this to sound circular, but there is a reference in the mandate letter that the Minister has provided to the college the development of an accountability framework. We are doing that collaboratively with the college over the next year. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Deputy Minister Haener. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Great to hear that the accountability framework is mentioned in the mandate letters, but can someone explain just a little bit more about this? Presumably, it's some sort of a system to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs and what they're doing and whether targets are being met and so on. Is that what this accountability framework is all about? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister Moses.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's the intent of this accountability framework. As you see, we do have a contribution agreement with the Aurora College for quite a lot of money and we want to make sure that dollars are being spent effectively, efficiently, and that they are held accountable to the dollars that we are providing them. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Moses. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. That is sort of what I had assumed the accountability framework was all about. Can the Minister now explain why these cuts are being made to Aurora College contributions before the strategic plan is finished, before an accountability framework is finished? Then we might probably have a better understanding of where the college can become more efficient and effective. Why make these cuts in advance of those exercises? It just doesn't make any sense. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister Moses.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Aurora College was given a target for reductions. They worked in collaboration with our department, looked at the

programs within the services that they provide, and as I have mentioned and said in the House, the graduation rates were very low coming out of these two programs. That was the decision that was made by both the Aurora College and our department moving forward. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Moses. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the explanation from the Minister. I don't agree with the process the department has gone about with this. Let's just get a little bit more detail about when was Aurora College told that they were going to get their contribution cut? Just a ballpark figure. Middle of September? When did that happen? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister Moses.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That was done in September of last year. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Moses. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Presumably, when the board of directors found out about the cut, they would probably have developed a revised budget for the college for the year. Was that revised budget submitted to the department? About when would that have happened and when would the department have approved it, or when would the Minister have approved it? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister Moses.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The process was that in September we approached Aurora College with reductions. They came back with revised reductions that they wanted to see in November. Those were finalized. Those revisions were put into the Main Estimates in December and sent to P and P.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Minister Moses. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So okay, now we have the paper trail right. The department told the college about reductions. They came back with a revised budget. That was then approved by the Minister and the department. The Minister has known about the cuts to these programs for several months, and now word is coming out about these because of e-mails to students and so on. Regular MLAs, we weren't really told about what was being reduced or cut in terms of the programs offered by the college. Once again, poor communications. Just unacceptable that this is the way that this sort of thing takes place. Again, it is being driven by the fiscal strategy and targets set by Cabinet. I think that is all I have to say about this, Mr. Chair. Just not a good way to go about planning and delivering on post-secondary education in the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you. I take that as a comment. Would the Minister like to respond?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. When we were working on the potential reductions with the Aurora College, we did send information to the clerk's office to share

with the standing committee. Once the revisions were made, we did send that to committee as well, and the Main Estimates in December, I believe. It might have been December 20. I would have to confirm the dates with that. I do believe Members should have been aware of this last year at some time. Then January 9th, I believe, was the very finalized draft in the main estimates that was presented to committee. Thank you, Mr. Chair.