

## ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

### QUESTION 892-18(2): UNIVERSAL CHILDCARE

September 27, 2017

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. My statement earlier today referred to the Feasibility Study of Universal Affordable Daycare in the NWT that was prepared at the direction of the last Assembly. You can find the study in our tabled documents if you know where to look. It's available on the University of Toronto website, but if you look on the GNWT website, including the Education, Culture and Employment Department, you can't find it there.

Will the Minister commit to putting this study back among the resource documents of his departmental website? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Sorry, that's a question to the Minister of Education. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we are committed to improving the accessibility, affordability, and inclusivity of childcare in the Northwest Territories. It continues to be a priority of our department, as well as a priority of this government. We want to ensure that we support the creation of new childcare spaces and programs in all of our communities across the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, currently we have childcare spaces in 23 of the 33 communities of the Northwest Territories. We need to put our focus, our finances, financial resources into making sure we have childcare spaces throughout the NWT, so there are 10 communities that we need to continue to work with.

The GNWT over the past two years has put into place a variety of initiatives to address the accessibility and the affordability, and we continue to focus on that. We've implemented junior kindergarten. We've made significant changes to streamline and simplify the licensing and funding application process for NWT licenced early childhood programming among many other things, Mr. Speaker. We're continuing to commit to focus on accessibility and affordability to ensure that all of our communities in the Northwest Territories have early childhood programs and spaces. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I'd like to thank the Minister for his statement in the House about childcare. Unfortunately, he didn't answer my question about whether he would make the study available on his department's website, but maybe I'll give him a chance to answer that with my next question.

The proposed changes to the mandate were brought forward to this House by Cabinet. What is the position of the Minister on universal childcare for the Northwest Territories and when will that happen?

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** With the mandates and the focus of this government to ensure that we do have childcare spaces in all of our communities, before we can even get into

universal childcare we've got to make sure that all of our communities do have childcare spaces, and the fact we can actually put our resources that we have now within the remainder of this government to focus on addressing the childcare spaces and needs in 10 more communities across the Northwest Territories while maintaining and sustaining the early childhood programs that currently exist in all of our other communities.

I think that, as a government, we should put our focus on getting all our communities childcare to not only help the child, give the child every chance to succeed, but also help families as well.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I don't seem to be having much luck with the Minister today. He still hasn't answered my question about whether he can make this study available on his departmental website.

Of course, if there are 10 communities missing childcare facilities or programs, that should be part of an action plan. The proposed revisions to the mandate would axe the commitment to universal childcare and the action item in our current version of the mandate calls for an action plan for universal daycare within the next two years. It doesn't mean we're going to do it; it just says that we should have a plan to do it. That's from 18 months ago. This means that, until the mandates change, the department should have been working on this commitment and the work should almost be done by now.

Can the Minister tell us the status of the work on an action plan for universal childcare in the Northwest Territories?

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** We do currently have an early childhood development action plan within this government, and we're also working on an early learning and childcare agreement with the federal government to look at outlining where our focus is going to be over the next three years.

The Member asks us if we're going to put energy into creating this action plan. We have some documents that we're referring to right now, but a lot of our energy has been working with some of those communities to create daycares. We have two new daycares in two of our smallest communities, and it's a very successful story.

I'm working to make sure that all communities across the Northwest Territories will have that opportunity to see their children, their youngest, succeed, as well as families getting the supports that they need with child daycare.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. I seem to be having problems here with the Minister, getting actually any answers to any of my questions today. He cannot tell me if he is going to post a study to his website. He does not want to tell me what his position is with regard to universal childcare. He cannot tell me what is happening with the action plan that his department was supposed to be developing.

Let us go back to the feasibility study. It estimated that a territory-wide program could be introduced for a cost starting at about \$20 million a year. Since then, junior kindergarten has come on-stream, which largely replaces the need for child care spaces for junior

kindergarten-aged children. Has the Minister's department calculated the reduced implementation cost for universal childcare in the NWT, given junior kindergarten is in place; and if so, what are the reduced costs for universal child care? Masi, Mr. Speaker. I did give him a heads up, so I don't know what the problem is. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** As I mentioned, our focus is to make sure that we provide those childcare spaces. We have increased subsidies for early childhood programming, specifically on the infant spaces. We are putting more time and energy into making sure that all families in the Northwest Territories have that opportunity in early childhood programs. Subsidies, we made changes to the childcare benefit, the NWT childcare benefit. We are doing a lot of work in the area around early childhood development, and we want to continue to make sure that all of our communities have access to childhood spaces so that our children can succeed, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.