

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 72-18(3): ARTS FUNDING

February 9, 2018

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I have some questions for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. I am not going to ask for his head, hands, or feet. I just want a little bit of his time and money.

The current staffing of the NWT Arts Council deals with more than 120 applications a year, requesting about \$1.5 million against a budget of \$600,000. There are two application deadlines a year, and staff can barely keep up. There has been no increase in the NWT Arts Council budget for 10 years, and there is nothing in the budget that was tabled by the finance Minister yesterday. Can the Minister tell us what will trigger an increase in the budget and capacity of the NWT Arts Council? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently, there is no trigger to look at what will help in determining an increase in the budget. As I mentioned yesterday, when it comes to supporting the arts in the Northwest Territories, collectively as a government we are looking at what all of our supports are within the departments. I also just want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that my department, the Department of ECE, has the second-highest per-capita rate in Canada when it comes to providing support for the arts, culture, and heritage here in the Northwest Territories, and every year we serve approximately 250 clients in the Northwest Territories on a yearly basis. That has helped foster some very healthy relationships when it comes to supporting arts in the NWT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. I am just glad that no one put their foot in their mouth on these questions. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I don't think I can top that. I appreciate the response from the Minister, and I know staff work hard to get money out the door and so on, but we could be accessing a lot more federal funding, as well. There are over 15 funding programs listed on a Heritage Canada website that could be used to support arts activities and initiatives in the NWT. They cover everything from performing arts to capital investment opportunities. Can the Minister give us a snapshot of what federal program and capital funding the NWT received this year for arts-related activities and projects? I did give him a heads-up, so he knows about this.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Any support that we get from third parties or any of our partners in terms of supporting our culture, our heritage, and our arts programs here in the Northwest Territories is greatly appreciated, and I know our staff work very hard to try to access those funds. However, I do not have that information on hand with me right now, but once I do get that information I will be happy to share it with the Member and committee and all Members who are interested in knowing how much we are supporting the artists in the Northwest Territories in taxes and other sources of funding.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks again to the Minister for that commitment. He will pull together the information. We will get it. The currently prevailing plan for promotion of the arts is the 2004 NWT Arts Strategy, and it states as its goal "the coordination of programs and services that will ensure more effective and efficient use of available funds." As a means of achieving this goal, will the Minister commit to examining the amalgamation of all GNWT arts funding, production, and marketing programs under the leadership of an arm's-length NWT arts council?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: I do agree. The NWT Arts Council does play a very important role as an advisory board to me as Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. I did mention yesterday that I will be working with the Minister of ITI to look at options moving forward in terms of whether it is a strategy or how we can work better together and more collaboratively and, obviously, having the NWT Arts Council play a pivotal role in that. They are the ones who we assign to the boards, and they are the ones with the expertise who also help give us direction on how these funds are being allocated throughout the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Once again, I would like to thank the Minister for his response. That is good news. Yesterday he committed to reviewing GNWT support for the arts, and he has made some additional commitments here, in my view, today. I really hope that this review is going to be more than just pulling together the current support across at least two departments and then concluding that everything is just fine. Clearly, structural change is needed to bring an improved focus to this sector and to better leverage federal funding. Can the Minister tell us just what he is going to review with regard to support for the arts and when he will report back publicly? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: I did mention that we are working with the departments to see what the overall supports that the GNWT as a whole gives to the arts community as well as culture and heritage. Once we get those numbers, we can start having further discussions moving forward, but that work has to be done first. Currently, I do not have a timeline, but, as soon as we get that information, we will be sharing with Members. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.