

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 816-18(3): NWT ARTS STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

August 15, 2019

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. My statement recounted the disappointed arts community leaders who report that they have long appealed for the collection of hard data on the value of extended productivity of their sector. They say that this kind of data should have driven consultations around the development of an action plan for the NWT Arts Strategy. I would like to ask the Minister: why has the detailed data collection, through a survey of artists, producers, and presenters, not been done? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is quite disheartening to hear these comments today, in all honesty. I had a conversation with the MLA the other day about one organization representing the interests of all of the people who would be covered within that. This is an example of how, sometimes, it doesn't work really well.

We started out with the Arts Strategy, and between November 2018 and March 2019, we have done 16 key stakeholder engagements, we have 277 general public members who responded to an online survey, and then we realized that we hadn't engaged with the Arts Council, the NWT Arts Council, who are the leaders, who are supposed to represent the people who are artists. So I spoke to my colleague Minister, because we both have an interest in this, the Minister for ITI, and he agreed with me.

We stopped the process, we called the NWT Arts Council, and we got together. My department worked with them on input into the strategy. I did a personal meeting with the NWT Arts Council. I spent three or four hours with them in an evening and told them how important it was that we work together. This strategy would not be good if we did not work together; it's all of us.

To stand here and hear that the leaders in the arts community felt that we didn't hear them is really disheartening, because I did my best, Mr. Speaker. At no time when I was meeting with the NWT Arts Council did any of this data thing come even to fruition, so I am kind of not feeling really good about this, Mr. Speaker. I am open to feedback on how I can reach out to leaders. If the Arts Council is not the leaders, then I need to know who I should be dealing with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I just love the passion of the Minister. I am not criticizing the engagement process that was gone through in terms of developing the Arts Strategy. I am talking about the action plan. These are the specific actions we need to undertake to support the Arts Strategy, and at the core of that is knowing where we are, the kind of information data that will drive how we can improve, and give us the direction of where we need to go. That is what I heard from the leaders who I have been talking to. How is the Minister going to ensure that the new action plan under the Arts Strategy is

coordinated across the three departments that she just mentioned?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: We just finished the consultation pieces on the action plan, people from throughout the Northwest Territories on what their ideas are. We are just compiling that information right now, and we will be developing a "what we heard" report, just like we always say. The reality is, after that report is done, actually, we need to meet together, all departments that are involved in this action plan and in the identified actions, because I do not even know what they are going to say yet, and any department that has some kind of action that will be required, we will be working together to make sure that those happen. I also want to expand on that and say that, with my meeting with the NWT Art Societies, I also emphasized again that this plan is about them, this is their stuff, so we have made a commitment that we will work closely with them on the development of the action plan. The strategy was the beginning. The plan is going to expand on that. My commitment, the other Ministers' commitment, was that we were all engaged in this together. We have made a commitment to work as closely as possible.

MR. O'REILLY: I just love the passion of the Minister, again, and I am sure she can encourage her fellow Ministers to be as collaborative on all fronts with this side of the House. I would like to know, though: how is the Minister going to ensure that the new action plan under the Arts Strategy is put together in a way that it ensures our support programs are designed to take advantage of matching funding in other complementary programs?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Any good program needs money. We all know that. I don't think I am going to get any argument on that one. Part of the action plan, an action plan is supposed to be comprehensive. The strategy says: this is what we want. The plan says: how do we get to that strategy? If we are not looking at how we are getting funding, then that would be a detriment to the plan going forward, so we will be open to accessing outside funding sources. I also want to say that we are already doing some of that. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment regularly accesses outside funding sources, such as those available through Canadian Heritage. I am also pleased to say that I am also meeting next week with the executive director for the Canadian Council for the Arts, so, although it's not mandated or anything, we regularly do look for outside funding sources to help any of the programs. That is what we do as Ministers.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Just sometimes it's actually easier for those outside of government to access federal money, but I am sure the Minister knows that. However, it's never too late to put in place a proper data collection system to help us build the case and rationale for further investment in the arts and cultural sector, so will the Minister ensure that the relevant departments working on the action plan under the Arts Strategy make data collection a priority?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Again, it was just today that I realized that this was an issue, at all. I started out here four years ago. When I did a speech in the House about getting in to become a Minister, I talked about my experience in accreditation, not knowing anything about politics, only about best practices. Best practices in

accreditation talks about evaluation, it talks about data, it talks about measurable outcomes, so I have carried that right through my whole four years. I did that with the polytech education act about quality education based on best practices. It would be foolish for me to stand here at the end of my term and say I am throwing out what I believe in, so, yes, I will definitely make that commitment, that data is important for any program evaluations. Measurable outcomes are important, and we need to make sure that we have those in place. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.