

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE
QUESTION 17-19(2): EDUCATION AUTHORITIES TERM OF OFFICE

February 6, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My question is for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment on the issue of coordination of municipal and education authorities' terms of office. Can the Minister tell us whether and when he has received any formal request from the Yellowknife education authorities or CSFTNO requesting changes to allow for a four-year term? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March of 2019, YK1 and YCS raised the issue through a joint letter to ECE. To my knowledge, CSFTNO has not raised the issue through a formal channel like that, but I am sure that it is on their radar. ECE officials have engaged with the Yellowknife DEAs to begin to try to figure out how to solve this issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that information. We have been informed by the Yellowknife education authorities that the overwhelming opinion of parents is that they want money spent on education rather than holding elections. Does the Minister agree that additional costs for separate elections by education authorities to conduct their own elections would be better spent on children's education?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: The best-spent money is always on children's education, so it's hard to argue with that.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for the straightforward response. The situation for CSFTNO is different, as I mentioned in my statement, in that its commissaires represent two communities that now have different cycles for their municipal elections. To me, it sounds like the best solution here may be to allow education authorities to set their own terms of office, with approval of the Minister, of course. I am sure that the Minister is aware of this complication, but I am wondering whether his department has contemplated a solution for the term of office issue for CSFTNO.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: The department is aware and looking into this. Unfortunately, I have to report that we do not have a silver bullet for this issue. It is going to take a bit

more research, but we are committed to doing that, and I will get back to the Member when we have that information.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister. Great to hear that he and his staff are working already on this issue. I am just wondering whether the Minister can commit to making the small changes that are likely necessary in the Education Act to avoid spending money on elections rather than education. Can he make those changes before 2021? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: The department has looked at a number of ways of doing this. Unfortunately, there is no way of getting around the fact that the board members were 24 elected for a fixed period of time. Any change to that period of time, to extend it, would be antidemocratic. If you are elected to a certain period, if the voters vote you in and they think that you are going to be there for this many years because that is what the legislation says, I am not willing to extend that. What would be required would be a plebiscite, similar to what municipalities do. I believe in democracy. I am a strong supporter of democracy. I do not believe that we should be extending term limits. We are not kings here. We are politicians who were duly elected. That being said, the department has had conversations with the education authorities. We are committed to working with them to mitigate the cost as much as we can. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.