

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE
QUESTION 118-19(2): ENROLMENT OF STUDENTS IN FRENCH FIRST-
LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMS / MINISTERIAL DIRECTIVE ON
ENROLMENT IN FRENCH-LANGUAGE
EDUCATION

February 28, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. In my statement earlier today, I mentioned the often-strained relations between our government and the NWT francophone community over education. Can the Minister tell me how many applications for admissions by nonrights holders have been reviewed in total under the 2016 directive, and how many have been approved? I did give the questions to my friend across the aisle earlier today. 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. The Member doesn't want me to say, "I don't know." Well, I do know. There have been 29 individual student applications. Twenty-three of those student applications under the 2016 directive have been approved, which means that those children, as well as, for the most part, most of their siblings, are now eligible to attend. Thank you.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that information. Given that our government has ended up in court at least four times regarding francophone firstlanguage education rights, can the Minister give us an estimate of how much money has been spent on these court proceedings by our government?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: The money spent on court proceedings pursuant to the 2016 directive is \$220,000.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that response. I can think of lots of other ways to spend that \$220,000. The NWT is the only place in Canada where admissions to francophone first-language schools is still directly controlled by a Minister; at least, that's my understanding. Does the Minister agree that it is time to review the ministerial directive from 2016?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: If the directive is winding us up in court or is putting us into court proceedings, obviously, it can be improved upon, and I'm very live to this issue. I'm from Hay River, where we have a French first-language school, and I've been looking closely at this file. I'm not looking at a formal review right now, but I am personally reviewing it. I am having conversations. I had a conversation this morning, or rather yesterday morning, about this, and I'm having further conversations. MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. I understand it's not a formal review, but I appreciate his interest in the file. He sat in the House last year, or in the last Assembly. He's from a community that has Ecole Boreale, so I'm glad to hear he's started work on this. Our government needs a better approach to collaboration with the francophone community over implementation of education rights. I'm wondering: how will the Minister ensure this relationship changes as we begin the 19th Assembly? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: I'm trying to build the best relationships I can with all the education leaders in the territory. To that end, I phoned the chair of every DEC or regional authority in the territory when I first took office. I've had conversations with all but one of the members of the board of the French schools. Again, yesterday, I reached out to the chair and I'm setting up a meeting so that we can have a discussion, myself and the board, with no one else in the room, no one from the department, no employees of the board, just the elected officials, to figure out how, as reasonable people, we can come to a reasonable solution, because my conversations with everyone on the board have been great. Everyone wants the same thing. Everyone wants quality education for the students, and I'm sure we can come to a solution. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.