

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE
QUESTION 181-19(2): STUDENT LOAN REMISSION PUBLIC REPORTING

March 11, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Earlier today, I discussed the ongoing saga where individual student names in loan remission amounts continue to be published in our public accounts. Can the Minister tell us whether he has had a chance to review this practice and whether he is prepared to change it? 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 knows very well that I have reviewed this concern. I sat in many meetings with him while he opined on the merits of displaying students' names in the public accounts. I'm well aware of the issue, and yes, I'm going to fix it.

MR. O'REILLY: I guess today is my lucky day, and it is for all students in the Northwest Territories, as well. One of the options to stop this unnecessary invasion of privacy is to make legislative amendments to the Student Financial Assistance Act and/or the Financial Administration Act. This, of course, could be undertaken by Cabinet or as a private Member's bill. Can the Minister tell us how Cabinet intends to proceed and what changes will generally be brought forward?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: I think there are the minor amendments that ECE would like to have made to the SFA Act. One of those will be changing the rules so that, notwithstanding the FAA, the student names will not have to be publicly reported. What needs to happen here is a legislative proposal will come to me, I will approve it, and it will go to a standing committee. The standing committee will have to provide response and comment. At that point, it will have to go to Cabinet for approval, and then a bill will have to be drafted, which will then have go back to Cabinet for approval. At that point, it will be brought into this House and the Legislative Assembly will take hold of the bill. This process could be done. We could see the introduction in the May-June sitting, if we hear back from the standing committee soon enough and if it goes through all those steps. That's the plan right now, to introduce the bill in the May-June sitting.

MR. O'REILLY: I do want to sincerely thank my Cabinet colleagues because I know I've been talking to them about this over the last several months. This is great progress, I think. I'm very happy, and I think we should all be happy with some movement on this.

Can the Minister tell us how soon the practice will stop and whether it will be in time for the 2019-2020 public accounts?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Like I mentioned, there are a lot of factors that are out of my control, personally. While we may have seen the last publication of student names, I can't make any promises. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.