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Appointments to GNWT Committees, Boards, and Councils
Committee of the Whole—2019-2020 Operating Budget Review
Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs – March 4, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks. After a while, we all look the same. Thanks, Madam Chair. I think that this is the part of Executive and Indigenous Affairs where board appointments are, sort of, tracked and so on. I do want to commend even the previous government did a better job at making sure that there was gender balance in our appointments to GNWT committees, boards, and councils, but what we saw in the last Assembly was a trend towards appointment of deputy ministers -- I guess, sometimes they're government employees, and sometimes they're not -- to boards. What is the plan for this Cabinet, moving forward? Are we going to see those Cabinet Ministers phased out of board appointments and public governance restored? What is the general approach, moving forward? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Our department has just compiled a recent list of all of the board vacancies, throughout not only the Northwest Territories but federal departments, as well. We will be sharing that with Ministers. We will be giving direction that a gender-plus analysis be looked at within those board appointments. In the last Assembly, I must say that, when I was the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, I was adamant on every single appointment. When they were being appointed, I was asking, "Is it a woman, and if it's not a woman, why is it not a woman?" Those are conversations we are still bringing up. Is it a woman? Is it Indigenous? Is it a stakeholder? Is it the right person for the position? We will continue to do that.

I am more than willing to review all board appointments, because that is something that we need to do. Not only are we looking at a gender-plus analysis, but we are also looking at terms to make sure that the rotation is correct. There is quite a bit of work that we are doing with our board appointments, and we will continue to do that throughout our term of this government. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Madam Premier. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I want to thank the Minister for that response. She dealt with everything except the issue of deputy ministers being appointed to serve on boards. We saw, I think, a troubling trend of that in the last Assembly, the public board for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation was replaced by deputy ministers. Aurora College, that board was removed. What are the Premier's plans, moving forward, with restoring public governance to some of these key corporations and boards, moving forward? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Sometimes I do speak a bit fast. I had sandwiched it in there, but I'll be a little bit more concise. We are committed to reviewing all boards, and that would include the boards that deputy ministers do sit on. As for the other board that was brought up by the Member, that would be the Aurora College board; there is a framework, a timeline, that the applicable Minister is looking at within that. Those are questions, if you wanted more detail, that would be appropriate for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Madam Premier. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I want to thank the Premier for that response. It's good to hear that board governance is something that is under review. I'm just curious; the deputy ministers who are sitting on boards, do they receive any instructions from Ministers in terms of what they are to do on those boards, or are they at least at arm's length? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. My own Deputy Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs does sit on that board, and I just asked him, "Have you ever received instructions?" and he said, "Never," so they are unfettered in direction from any Cabinet Ministers. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Madam Premier. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Well, great to get that firsthand experience right at the table. I am still a little bit skeptical. Look, I appreciate that, but I just think that those deputy ministers are put into a very difficult situation, where they have full-time employment and then they're doing this on the side. I just don't think it's fair to our deputy ministers, either. I take the Minister's commitment to review this, moving forward, and I am sure that Members of this House will continue to remind her of that commitment and look to see progress on it. Thanks, Madam Chair.