

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

**QUESTION 474-19(2):
FRANCOPHONE SCHOOL ADMISSIONS AND FUNDING**

November 4, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madame la Presidente. My questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. The Commission scolaire francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest were pleased with the new regulations on school admissions, though a few issues remain outstanding. First, can the Minister tell us why GNWT persists in its appeals of the two court decisions on refused admissions under the former ministerial directive? Why don't we just drop the cases? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Member. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have made public comments on this, so it's on the record. I have had frank conversations with the chair of the CSFTNO, and so we are both aware of each other's positions. I can have a frank conversation with the Member. However, as you know, Madam Speaker, Rule 24(g) prohibits the discussion of matters that are before the courts, and I don't want to offend the rules of this Assembly. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I am always up for a frank conversation with my friend across the Chamber. There is a proposal to renovate the current Galerie Plein Soleil daycare at a cost of approximately \$1.2 million. When the first request was made, funds were available from Heritage Canada if GNWT matched the funds, but the project has been rejected twice by our government, even after Heritage Canada increased its potential funding. Can the Minister explain why the project has been rejected twice, even after Heritage Canada funding was increased?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: The department worked closely with the proponent on the proposal to the federal government, but in the end, the cost was just too much for the GNWT. We have an Early Learning and Childcare Infrastructure Fund that is \$500,000 a year for the entire territory, and our cost for this project would have been greater than that for the creation of six spaces. It couldn't be justified under our fiscal reality.

MR. O'REILLY: The reason why I'm raising this, of course, is the French daycare Galerie Plein Soleil is actually located in one of our schools, something that I think we're trying to aim for in ensuring that we make good use of our school spaces, as well, and collocate daycares. As I understand it, there was to be a dramatic improvement in the use of space in the current daycare. That would add six spaces, and then a second phase would add additional spaces. Of course, increasing daycare spaces is a priority of the 19th Assembly, and so I think we're missing out on this cost-shared opportunity. When will the Minister accept this proposal that will allow Galerie Plein Soleil to respond to the huge demand for daycare spaces for francophone children in Yellowknife?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: It's not a matter of accepting the proposal. The proposal has been looked at, and as I stated, it was over half-a-million dollars for six spaces. It sounds like there was a second phase, which I'm guessing would have been more. There were additional improvements to the space. I understand that, but the fact is that we have limited resources. We have a lot of needs all over the territory, and there are competing priorities. I wish I could fund all the spaces and especially French-first-language spaces. I know that there is a limited number of those in the territory, but the numbers didn't add up in this instance. It's a shame, but we're still willing to work closely with the proponent and see what we can do in the future.

DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplemental. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madame la Presidente. I want to thank the Minister for that. Of course, I'm going to keep pressing this issue. My next question, though, is about GNWT policies that require CSFTNO to sometimes conduct internal workplace investigations. Of course, the employees are French-speaking. The GNWT offers assistance with workplace investigations but in English only. When CSFTNO has to do this work, it costs them about \$64,000 a year. Will the Minister commit to making an arrangement with CSFTNO to reimburse these additional costs or provide these services in French, en français? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: The Member is correct. The GNWT doesn't provide these services at all. It doesn't have the ability to provide these services currently. School boards are funded for their operations, including things like workplace assessments. That said, though, I will have a discussion with the Minister of Finance and see what kind of progress we can make on this. Thank you, Madam Speaker.