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MINISTER OF EDUCATION, CULTURE
AND EMPLOYMENT

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Aurora College Foundational Review

Mr. Speaker, our government has a responsibility to make sure that Northwest Territories residents have access to the best education programs possible. We owe it to our students to give them programs that are well designed, up to date, and position them to go into the kind of jobs that employers are looking to fill. We also owe it to our young people to make sure that the system and institutions through which we deliver education programs are managed efficiently and effectively and that its chains of responsibility among all the decision makers are absolutely clear.

As Members will recall, there was significant debate in this House and in the media last winter over how decisions were being made about Aurora College programming and who was making them. Although there was significant evidence showing that two of the College's programs were not having the intended results, there was little agreement on what to do about them. Many ideas were shared during that debate, including a strong call to make foundational changes to the way we do business so the people of the Northwest Territories have the kind of educational institution they need and deserve.

These were the circumstances last March when I decided to announce a foundational review of Aurora College. At the time, I said the foundational review will help inform the government's long-term vision for Aurora College and position it to provide the necessary skills and knowledge our residents require to participate in and contribute to the social and economic fabric of the NWT for decades to come.

That is still our vision for this much-needed review, Mr. Speaker.

At the end of June I wrote to the Standing Committee on Social Development to confirm that I had incorporated its recommendations into the final Terms of Reference for the Review so that we could engage independent expertise to conduct the review. At that point, our intention was to have the review completed in December 2017, and this is reflected in the Terms of Reference that are available on the ECE website.

At the end of August, Committee replied to my letter indicating that they had some concerns with the proposed timelines for the project. I replied on September 1st, advising Committee that I recognized and shared its perspective and agreed that we need to take the necessary time to ensure the review is both thorough and strategic.

I also advised Committee that my officials would work with the contractor to develop a detailed work plan and that I would advise them if any change was required on the timing of the review as a result.

As Members are aware, we have recently completed the contracting process and are working with the contractor to develop a detailed work plan that will also set out the schedule for the review. That work plan is currently being finalized and I look forward to sharing it with Committee before the end of Session.

I appreciate Committee's advice about the timelines and have decided to extend the timeline for the review to March 31, 2018. This will give the contractor the time required to complete a good, thorough review and consult with everybody they need to.

Once the contractor completes the Review, a departmental response will be prepared to support implementation of its recommendations. We will be sharing that response with Committee for input prior to finalization of the implementation plan. Based on the Review and the departmental response, the College will develop a long term strategic plan and the government will start implementing recommendations. Recommendations with resource implications will be advanced through the 2019-2020 Business Planning process.

Part of the contractor's job will also be to review and consider the results of an assessment of the College commissioned by a previous government in 2013. While it wouldn't be appropriate for me to speak to the decisions of that government, I will be tabling this assessment later today so the public is able to see the whole report. I provided all members with copies of this report on June 20th, and while that assessment contained many good recommendations – including a recommendation to undertake a more comprehensive review of the college – this is a different time and a different government. It is important that this government's decisions are based on current evidence and current circumstances. At the same time, we don't want to lose any of the good work from the previous study and will ensure that it is one of the inputs the contractor considers as part of the current foundational review.

One of the major challenges of this project has been finding the right balance between doing the work well and doing the work quickly, Mr. Speaker. While we would all like this work to be completed quickly, I believe it is more important that the work is done well as it will help set the course for the College for the next ten or twenty years.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to take the time that is needed to do this review well. We owe it to current and future Aurora College students to set a strong, clear course for decades, not for just the next two or three years. This is an issue that is too important to rush, and I look forward to working with Members on a long term solution for the College, not a short-term fix.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.