

**Aurora College Transformation Progress**

Mr. Speaker, The transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university is a priority of this Legislative Assembly and I am pleased to say that we continue to make progress.

To be successful, we must focus investments in programs and services that lead to better education and employment outcomes for residents, including through our post-secondary education system.

Mr. Speaker, success requires the right changes, in the right order, at the right time. Following from the Government Response to the Aurora College Foundational Review, one of those changes has been the recent establishment of an Academic Advisory Council to advise Aurora College through the technical elements of the transformation process. The Academic Advisory Council is made up of eight highly-regarded academic institutions from across Canada that will provide support and guidance on the technical aspects of the transformation.

Members may be aware that the first meeting of the Academic Advisory Council took place on November 26, 2019; this meeting received national attention in the academic community. I was pleased to be a part of that first meeting and was impressed by the dedication and excitement around the table.

Mr. Speaker, to be clear, the Academic Advisory Council is a temporary measure to gain technical advice at this early stage. What is not temporary is this government's commitment to genuine engagement and ongoing communication with Northwest Territories Indigenous governments, industry stakeholders and residents, both during the transformation and moving forward under the polytechnic university.

We have been working with Indigenous government partners, key industry stakeholders and Aurora College Staff on a variety of critical elements of the Aurora College Foundational Review, Government Response to the Review, development of the Northwest Territories Post-Secondary Education Vision and Goals and, currently, a 3-Year Aurora College Strategic Plan. Staff involvement in the transformation will be increased with the establishment of working groups within the college in the coming year.

Mr. Speaker, I have also directed the Associate Deputy Minister of Post-Secondary Education Renewal to take an innovative approach to engagement around the transformation process and with the evolution to a polytechnic university. We will soon be reaching out to Indigenous governments to establish a common understanding of what that approach will look like.

Members of this House will also play a role in the transformation process. I will be offering briefings to committee and will be providing quarterly progress reports throughout the process. My door is always open to Members of this House and I welcome your comments and feedback.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember that in the next ten years, we know that 78 per cent of the labour market will require a post-secondary education – whether it is a certificate, diploma, degree or a trade. Aligning with our labour market needs ensures that our economy can develop and diversify. I want to ensure our education programs are aligned with the labour market and that northerners are first in line for northern jobs.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the faculty and staff of Aurora College who are working with the Government of the Northwest Territories on the transformation. They continue to deliver quality programming, while at the same time developing and implementing a wide range of changes to create new opportunities for residents. My sincere thanks for their contributions and continued commitment to the students they serve.

Mr. Speaker, the transformation to a polytechnic university is a critical step in our economic and social development. Above all, we are working to secure a strong future for generations of northerners. Their aspirations must be met with quality, accessible and relevant education opportunities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.