

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Official Records for 17 May 2011

CORONER'S INQUEST

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Attorney General—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I'm going to warn the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and the member from Nepean–Carleton. If you want to have your discussions, please take them outside this chamber. Be respectful of the other members. So, it's a final warning to each member.

Member from Kenora–Rainy River.

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Attorney General: In October 2007, almost four years ago, two young First Nations people died in Thunder Bay. Inquests were ordered into their deaths. The families of the deceased young people asked Attorney General officials for information about whether the jury rolls, from which coroner's juries are selected, were representative. The AG official refused the request.

The Ontario Court of Appeal recently decided in favour of the First Nation families and said, "Their request for this information was quite reasonable. But they did not get any answers. Instead, they got the runaround. A lot of time and money might have been saved had the ministry ... simply provided this information."

Since then, more young people have died on the streets of Thunder Bay. Can the Attorney General explain giving the aggrieved families the runaround and wasting time and money while more young people die on the streets of Thunder Bay?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We're all at one in saying that terrible tragedies have occurred. I know that those at every level with any hint of responsibility are searching for answers. I won't comment, as my friend has done, on the specifics of the coroner's process. We'll leave that; that is proceeding. But at every level for us, we're looking for answers. I would hope the federal government is, because it actually funds the school. It is a private school run by the First Nations. I know everybody is interested in finding answers and working very hard to find them and the coroner's process will, in due course, provide some recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: It's not me who's commenting. This is the senior justice of the Ontario Court of Appeal, the highest court in Ontario. It says that your government hasn't been doing everything it can to get to the bottom of these issues. It says that your government has been giving the aggrieved families the runaround, that you've been wasting time and wasting money.

The Deputy Grand Chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation says, "Tragically, there has been another death in our communities and yet the Attorney General claims that Ontario is doing everything it can. After the deaths of seven of our teenagers in similar circumstances since 2000, I do not accept that this government can claim credibly that" they're doing everything they can.

Minister, how can you waste time, waste money and give families the runaround while more—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I agree with the Deputy Grand Chief that every death is a tragedy. We want to find answers for every death, every tragedy. We are working very hard within this government to find those answers. The coroner's inquest will hear evidence and, in due course, provide us with information.

I know my friend will want to direct some inquiries to the level of government responsible for the education of these young people because they came from their communities to another community to be educated. I know they came, funded, to a private school run by the First Nation, and I know everybody should be working as hard as they can to find answers.