

Gargan rebuked for views on culture

by Francis Thompson
Northern News Services

Fort Providence
Deh Cho MLA Sam Gargan has been strongly criticized by the hamlet of Fort Providence for suggesting that aboriginal cultures shouldn't be taught in schools.

"When I went to school there were no cultural programs," Gargan told the legislative assembly Sept. 15. "It was strictly the European style of education system. I have been successful in completing all my grades, perhaps because I was not expected to learn two different cultures and try to exercise them."

Gargan said communities had to take control of their cultural programs and run them outside the school system. "What we have in the delivery of cultural programs are strictly just token programs. . . . As far as I am concerned, when I go into a school, whether I am an MLA or not, it is still a white institution and I feel like a second-class citizen."

But at a special meeting Wednesday, the Fort Providence Hamlet Council accused

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—Sam Gargan

Gargan of not consulting the community and not expressing his constituents' wishes on the issue.

"The general consensus of council is that Mr. Gargan's concern and views on the delivery of education in Fort Providence are not widely held in the community at large," the hamlet council stated in a press release.

In fact, the hamlet is in full support of the cultural inclusion program at the local school, the council said.

Education Minister James

Arvaluk said he understood Gargan's views, but said the decision on whether cultural programs should be taught in schools is left to divisional boards of education.

"If the community feels that the responsibility for teaching aboriginal language or cultural programs, or land skills, should be done by the community as a whole rather than school, then that can be arranged through divisional boards," Arvaluk said.

Thebacha MLA Jeannie Marie-Jewell was more direct. She said it was critical to have aboriginal culture instilled in children in the school system from an early age.

But Gargan got support from Kivallivik MLA Silas Arngna'naaq.

"I feel that our culture is a way of life, and not a subject in a classroom," Arngna'naaq said.

"Inuit did not learn or live in building, so I do not see how we could study our culture in a building. It is taught out on the land, that is where we lived, and that is where it should be taught."

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