

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

**GOVERNMENT OF CANADA POSTHUMOUS PARDON OF EVERETT GEORGE
KLIPPERT**

February 29, 2016

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the Government of Canada's decision to right a historic wrong by pardoning Everett George Klippert. Mr. Klippert was the last man in Canada to be charged, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison for being gay.

Mr. Speaker, 50 years ago, gay men were routinely harassed by police even though they engaged in sex that took place between consenting adults. They were charged with gross indecency. Mr. Klippert had been charged with gross indecency in his hometown of Calgary and jailed for three years. When he finished his sentence, Mr. Klippert decided to make a new start and moved here to the Northwest Territories. He lived in Pine Point and worked at the mine as a mechanic's assistant.

In 1965, the RCMP arrested Mr. Klippert and again charged him with gross indecency. A court-ordered psychiatrist assessed Mr. Klippert as an "incurable homosexual." Judge J.H. Sissons agreed he was a dangerous offender based on his two sets of convictions for gross indecency. Sissons sentenced him to life in prison. In effect, he was sentenced to a life in prison for being gay.

The Supreme Court of Canada later upheld this decision, and then all hell broke loose. Tommy Douglas led the charge in the House of Commons, saying that homosexuality should not be considered a criminal issue. He found an ally in the justice minister of the day, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, who said, "there is no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation. What is done in private between adults doesn't concern the criminal code."

The modern movement to acquire equality rights for gays and lesbians began in Canada. Trudeau decriminalized homosexuality when he became Prime Minister. The day after the bill received royal assent, gay men in New York rose up against harassment by police. The Stonewall Riots of June 1969 drew the line on public harassment of private behaviour between consenting adults. Mr. Klippert remained in jail all this time. He was finally released in 1971, returned to Calgary, and died there 20 years ago.

Mr. Speaker, there have been significant changes in the last 50 years, which I will talk about in a moment. I would like to seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement. Thank you.

---Unanimous consent granted

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some things haven't changed. It is difficult to be openly gay in grade school. Last week we celebrated Pink Shirt Day, a means to combat bullying in school. This began as an important initiative to support gay youth, to promote their self-acceptance and acceptance by the rest of us, and has of course gone on to cover all forms of excuses for bullying.

What has changed in 50 years? While the law changed, many gays and lesbians live their sexuality quietly and privately because society as a whole is not supportive of us. Fifteen years ago, I was part of a gay and lesbian organization called Out North. We lobbied to have the government grant the same rights to us as to the rest of society. After a court battle, we won the right to adopt children, and in the new Human Rights Act, the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of sexuality.

Yellowknife is a welcoming community for gays and lesbians, and we are in important roles throughout the community. I am proud to be the first woman married to a woman elected to this legislature. All this started with Everett Klippert. I am grateful to him for being the catalyst of these changes and join in congratulating the Government of Canada on righting this historic wrong. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.