

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

DEPARTMENT OF MUNICIPAL AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS' CAPACITY TO SUPPORT ESSENTIAL SERVICES FOR COMMUNITIES

October 27, 2016

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the report from the Office of the Auditor General delivered a message about the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs that's both loud and clear: the department is not delivering enough support to communities that provide essential services to their residents. MACA can't simply transfer money to communities for drinking water, waste management, fire protection, and emergency preparedness and hope for the best, especially when the health and well-being of residents is at stake.

But that's more or less what's been happening. The most shocking finding for me is in the lack of support for community fire protection. I'm quoting from the report here: "The department did not know which communities had fire departments and if existing fire departments met the requirements of the Safety Act or could be considered responsive, including which had a sufficient number of trained firefighters." The department has known about this problem since its last assessment in 2010-2011, but has only started to respond to this crisis since this audit began.

Mr. Speaker, MACA has a responsibility set out in law and policy to actively monitor the delivery of all of these services. Yet time and again, the Auditor General found that MACA had received or was working with incomplete information from communities. The department requires accountability from communities but doesn't follow up if reports aren't provided, or to verify information given and then used for departmental planning. In some cases, the department knew about the gaps but hasn't been diligent in closing them. The consequences are that residents' safety is threatened in NWT communities, with out-dated emergency preparedness plans and stockpiles of hazardous waste.

Mr. Speaker, the department agreed with the 13 recommendations of the Auditor General, but that's obviously not enough. When the issues raised by the Auditor General are combined with those that result from the glacially slow efforts to revise and create legislation, I see a systemic problem. It shouldn't take years to follow up fire protection issues or having to wait until the next Assembly to revise the Cities, Towns and Villages Act. The department either has too few resources or too large a mandate to meet its legally mandated responsibilities. If ever a department was in need of a zero-based budget review, it's MACA. I'll have questions for the Minister