

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

INCOME ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

October 31, 2016

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, during this sitting of the Legislative Assembly, we've been debating changes to the NWT Income Assistance Program. We have learned that the new Canada Child Benefit no longer counts as income for people receiving income assistance. We've also learned that the department that administers income assistance has taken this opportunity to end the food and clothing allowances for children under 18.

Mr. Speaker, the effect of this change is two-fold. First, Ottawa is now paying for food, clothing and other necessities for children on income assistance through the Canada Child Benefit. The second is that the GNWT is paying less income assistance to families with children who are in need. Mr. Speaker, the government has been spinning this as a good news story because the bottom line is that poor families have more income.

Mr. Speaker, this is a claw-back by any other name, and I'm concerned there is another coming. In 2014, our Bureau of Statistics created a Northern Market Basket Measure as a tool to figure out what to pay recipients of income assistance for food. The Finance Minister of the day announced in his 2015 budget that an additional \$1.75 million would be added to the food allocation under the Income Assistance program, an allocation that until then hadn't been increased since 2009. The increases would be phased in over a number of years to catch food allowances up with escalating costs, but, instead of catching the food allowances up for children, they have been wiped out.

Mr. Speaker, are more cuts coming to Income Assistance with the introduction of the enhanced NWT Child Benefit? The Minister told us, "The NWT Child Benefit will provide additional financial support to more low- and modest-income residents with children," and this is the important part, "not just those accessing Income Assistance." That sounds like good news, but my concern is that the introduction of the revamped NWT Child Benefit will follow the same pattern as the Canada Child Benefit, namely, that the benefit won't be counted as income but it will result in reductions in income assistance rates. I will have questions for the Minister. Thank you.