

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

INDEPENDENT HOUSING FOR SENIORS

February 22, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today, I want to speak about a Catch-22 facing some of the retirement-aged seniors in my riding. They are well into their 60s, and they would like to retire after a long and full work life. They have worked hard, but for limited income, and they haven't been able to buy a condo or home along the way; and they don't have future income to look forward to, except the most basic federal pension. They cannot afford to retire and pay market rent for a place to live. Where will they live in the so-called "golden years"?

One potential remedy is Avens Court. It has 32 units that are subsidized so that tenants pay no more than 30 per cent of their income on rent. The down side is that demand for these units vastly exceeds the supply. There are about 60 people on the waiting list. Just three of these units turned over last year, so at that rate, people will spend 20 years on the waiting list.

Mr. Speaker, another potential remedy is Northern United Place. It also offers subsidized living to seniors. It also has a waiting list, although not as dramatic as Avens. There is also subsidized housing with Yellowknife Housing Authority, yet again, it has a substantial waiting list, especially of single people waiting for units.

There is another catch-22 working seniors face. While they are working, their income is too high to qualify for subsidized housing, and they have the money to pay market rent. Once they stop working, their income decreases dramatically. They have to continue to pay market rent until they get to the top of one of the waiting lists and into a subsidized apartment they can afford. The problem is that when being evaluated for eligibility for seniors housing, be it Avens, Northern United Place, or public housing in general, their income is assessed not as it would be if they were retired, but as it is while they continue to work.

This makes no sense, Mr. Speaker. For one of my constituents, this basically means he can never retire. If he quits work and does not have a low-cost housing spot, he cannot make his rent. If he keeps working, his income means that he will never get to the top of a crammed list.

This individual set of circumstances obviously begs the larger question of the availability of seniors housing, or innovative rent supplement solutions which might enable the much lower-cost option as seniors age in place. I will have questions for the Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.