

## MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

### SUGAR TAX BEST PRACTICES

February 23, 2017

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in recent years the idea of a sugar tax levied on sugary drinks like pop and juice has generated debate about outcomes. I would like to share my findings from a review of existing programs and best practices.

Sugar taxes typically focus on naturally or artificially sweetened beverages and are calculated based on volume, and might also include syrups or artificial sweeteners. They are usually implemented at the federal level, as in the countries of Hungary and Mexico. Here in Canada, the federal government has said only that it will continue to monitor emerging evidence on the effectiveness of such measures.

Media coverage often boils down to one of two narratives. Supporters argue for a sugar tax to take action on an obesity crisis. Detractors argue that a tax would increase taxes and interfere with consumers' free choice.

What is more, because sugar tax programs are still young, we don't have conclusive evidence of their results. Some promising results from Mexico suggest that their sugar tax has led to decreased soft drink sales in the order of 7.5 per cent over two years, but they are unable to calculate the effect of this drop on health.

It seems to me that this conversation speaks to the desire for policy that empowers consumers to both choose and access healthy food, a critical issue here in the NWT. I want to offer the finance Minister a couple of best practices for his budget commitment to explore a sugary drink tax.

First, the department must have clarity of purpose. While the budget address linked sugar taxes to health, a 2016 revenue options paper had dismissed the idea, arguing, as have other jurisdictions, that the expense would likely outstrip the income. I was also troubled by the same paper's suggestion that seeing low-income people paying a larger share would not be an issue. That sounds less proactive and more punitive.

Second, I point to the recommendations of both the Senate Committee and the Canadian Diabetes Association. Both suggest that a sugar tax is not a stand-alone magic bullet for better health. Instead, government needs to develop clear plans for dedicated use of levied funds and revise existing practices respecting healthy food affordability and regulation, labelling, and marketing of sugary beverages. Here, the GNWT may have a head start. For more than 10 years, Health and Social Services has encouraged students, families, and schools to "drop the pop."