

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

NATIONAL POVERTY CONSULTATION

May 30, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, poverty is a national issue which requires national solutions. The federal government has acknowledged this fact by working on a Canada-wide poverty reduction strategy. Yellowknife is a focus of special attention in this effort because it is the location of one of six case studies on poverty across the country, and there have been several consultations here in the last month.

Mr. Speaker, today I am going to talk about the public consultation hosted by the No Place for Poverty Coalition and Vibrant Communities Canada. About 30 people attended, including some of my colleagues here, as well as advocates, people who live in poverty, and those who work on the front lines.

Participants were asked to identify priority areas for poverty reduction efforts. The top two are food and housing. People noted that, in the NWT, we have both a food availability problem and a food affordability problem. This is not news to Members who have seen increasing food insecurity firsthand and through media reports. There is a need for both a short-term solution and systemic solutions to hunger. There is also an urgent need to revamp the Nutrition North program, as my colleague said earlier today.

On housing, the waiting list is long and getting longer rather than shorter. The federal decision to reduce support for the operations and maintenance of social housing is an obvious problem, as is the scheduled end of the program in 2038.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government has a leading role in addressing these two areas, but this government has a role to play as well. Our mandate commits this Assembly to increasing the availability of affordable housing and improving food security. These are areas that need urgent and sustained attention if people are going to get out of poverty, stay out of poverty, and give their kids hope for a different future.

In order to make the most of federal interest in this area at this time, the territorial government must consider how to align its poverty reduction efforts with those in Ottawa. That may be self-evident, but there is not a word, not one word, about these issues in the territorial government's federal engagement strategy.

Mr. Speaker, we can build roads to every community in this territory, as outlined in the engagement strategy, but you can't eat a road, and you cannot sleep in it, either. The need for more housing and more food is not going to go away. The GNWT and Ottawa have to work together to make a difference. I will have questions for the Minister responsible for Poverty. Mahsi.