

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN AND RESOURCES FOR CANNABIS LEGALIZATION

March 1, 2018

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the legalization of cannabis is now just a few months away. The question is: are we ready? My fear is that we will not be, and it is young people who are most at risk.

There was a high degree of interest on the public engagement on cannabis legalization last summer and fall, with one in 10 households responding to the GNWT's online survey. There was near-unanimous support for government spending on public awareness and education focused on youth that would provide evidence-based education on the risks related to cannabis use.

Mr. Speaker, those who responded to the survey want to see a full-court press with ads in mass media, social media, posters, pamphlets, and mandatory education in schools. Many people want teachers to take a leading role, and no doubt they will, but, Mr. Speaker, there is no substitute for the conversations parents and caregivers can have with their own children and youth. They have a unique position of authority and trust to help teens understand the risks.

I recently reviewed an excellent resource to use as a starting point for these conversations. It is called the Cannabis Talk Kit, and it is produced by Drug Free Kids Canada. I liked it because it provides signs to watch for that may indicate your teen is using and information about the effects of long-term use. It provides sample conversations about drug use and anticipated responses. It anticipates the way in which teens will minimize their use. There are no scare tactics here. This guide is based on being positive, active listening, and asking open-ended questions. It also offers guidance on what to say when your teen says, "You did it at my age," or they know that you still do.

These conversations are vital to help our teens understand the risks of cannabis, which they may underestimate.

Mr. Speaker, this guide is focused on harm reduction, and that's an approach I support. I think demanding abstinence from teens is tough, and it will be even tougher when cannabis is legal and they are old enough to buy it for themselves. A common sense approach that focuses on facts is likely to be better received and more effective. Of course, the same could be said for alcohol and tobacco use, as well.

Mr. Speaker, the government didn't include money for public awareness about cannabis use in the budget. Barring an unforeseen hitch, cannabis will become legal during the next fiscal year. Northerners have clearly said they want a robust public education plan. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services about what that is going to look like. Mahsi.