

## MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

### NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY

October 11, 2018

**MS. GREEN:** Mr. Speaker, today I rise to celebrate National Coming Out Day. In fact, today is the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of National Coming Out Day, which began with the March on Washington by gays and lesbians demanding equal rights.

Mr. Speaker, coming out as gay or lesbian, transgender or two-spirited, queer or bisexual is an important way to assert one's identity, to live freely and openly, and to seek support from allies. It is a milestone for every person who has ever done it, and the reaction from family and friends is a topic of conversation forever after.

Mr. Speaker, the reason I speak of this today, the reason there is an awareness day, is that there is still discrimination that must still be challenged and support offered to those who come out now.

I came out about 20 years ago. It took me a while to get there. I didn't have any role models that I knew of in my family, none in my peer group at school, and few in the public eye except for Ellen DeGeneres, who had come out the year before.

Living openly as gay person in a small town in Labrador was daunting, but hiding seemed worse. I started by telling friends and, after getting a positive reception from them, I slowly moved on to my family. Nobody freaked out. It's also fair to say that not everyone was excited by the prospect. They feared I would face discrimination and bullying, as well as limits on my opportunities. The prevailing advice was to "keep this news to ourselves."

Mr. Speaker, when I arrived in Yellowknife in the spring of 2000, I connected with a queer support and advocacy group called OutNorth. There, for the first time in my life, I felt a sense of community and full acceptance. This was the time when gays and lesbians were lobbying government for equality rights, including the protection of sexual identity in the Human Rights Act, the right to adopt children, and the right to marry. It was not an easy journey, but we slowly, primarily through court action, got the rights we needed, wanted, and deserve.

I would like to think the coming out journey is easier for young people today. In Yellowknife, they have the Rainbow Youth Centre, a safe place to spend time, participate in programs, and use the centre's resources. Schools are now more welcoming, with gay/straight alliances or similar groups for queer youth to connect with.

One of the most important changes in the last 20 years is the emergence of role models who came out, live openly, and advocate publicly for equality and acceptance. Here in the NWT, there are role models in every area of our community, including me. I am here today to say: come out when you are ready. There are lots of us here to support you in living your best and happiest life. Mahsi.