

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

GNWT CANNABIS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

October 17, 2018

MS. GREEN: Mr. Speaker, here we are, October 17, and recreational cannabis is now available to everyone who is 19 years or older. For Regular MLAs, it's been a rushed and at times overwhelming sprint to this point. Even now, the government doesn't have all the pieces in place, such as a fully costed implementation plan. Let's pause and take stock of how we got here.

First of all, legalization wasn't our idea. It was the feds who decided that regular citizens should no longer be made criminals because they smoke pot. Our response to this downloaded priority has consumed huge amounts of this Assembly's time and treasure and energy. Other priorities have been pushed aside.

It's worth remembering that the effect of cannabis is to alter consciousness, or in other words, to become intoxicated. This is recreational, not medicinal cannabis. During our public hearings in the spring, elders spoke of their concerns about legalizing another intoxicant. We in the NWT have a sadly large experience with the results of people becoming too intoxicated, too often, and with the social toil of dependency and costs of recovery. During those same hearings, parents voiced concern about the effects of cannabis on the brain development of young people. There is a significant downside here for youth and important questions about impaired driving for people of all ages. So you won't hear me cheering today.

Another benefit the federal government has been touting is an end to the black market, taking cannabis sales into the public taxation system and drying up revenue for organized crime. In our jurisdiction, I have my doubts about these so-called benefits. First, you'll need a lawyer to get through the paperwork to set up a private store here. If you live at the end of a Canada Post box, your online order may be delivered by the end of the month. Even if people have credit cards, which many don't, the black market in small communities will be easy and quick, as it's always been.

What we have today is the beginning of a new vigilance. We need to assess whether the approach we have been hurried to institute is appropriate, to evaluate it soon and often, and adjust as necessary. We need to monitor the use and effects of pot on our youth and citizens, on the need for dependency treatment, and the possible health care consequences of smoking behaviours.

I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Mahsi.