

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

EXPANDING TOURISM PRODUCTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

October 18, 2018

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate Small Business Week, and to shine a light on small business in the tourism sector in particular. There is more we can do to build on and enhance their success and to enrich the experience and opportunities of visitors to the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, I went to Iceland at the beginning of June for 10 days. Seven of those days were spent on a carefully curated knitting tour of western Iceland. The remainder was spent in and around the capital city of Reykjavik. The scenery was breathtaking, the people were hospitable, and the possibilities for activities, and purchases, were endless. I can't wait to go back.

Mr. Speaker, the NWT has a lot to offer on both the scenery and hospitality fronts, but we must find new ways to support small businesses that offer tourists more to do while they are here. The simple math is that, the longer visitors stay, the more they spend. The labour-intensive multiplier effects of this spending are enormous. Yellowknife is a popular destination, with tens of thousands of tourists spending millions of dollars here annually.

The limiting factor to phenomenal growth we have seen is the lack of things to do. It is at best a three-night destination for most travellers. Some active tourists may even say that length of time is too long. Aurora viewing and dog sledding are well-established in Yellowknife, along with day trips and various cultural activities, but additional indoor activities in and around Yellowknife are limited, especially at this time of year, when it is not summer and it is not winter, either.

Since tourism businesses are usual small businesses, they need a hand with research and development of additional activities for visitors. The Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment has a program to meet this need, but it could be working more effectively. The Minister has said that submissions exceed available funds by a significant amount. The program's website says that it is not taking applications at this time. Clearly, this is a program that needs a bigger budget. Let me reiterate the need for a top-class tourism information centre. The lack of a centre is ridiculous.

Mr. Speaker, Iceland has grown its tourism economy almost tenfold in 10 years, and that is in spite of the fact that it is an expensive place to visit. The Icelandic government has made investment in this sector a priority, and the metrics of money earned and people employed are impressive. It is time for our government to increase its investment in product diversification, so that visitors will, as I said, stay longer and spend more. I will have questions for the Minister of ITI. Mahsi.