

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

LOCATION OF A FUTURE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

February 21, 2019

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last month the City of Yellowknife released its university feasibility and benefits study. The purpose of the study was different than the Aurora College foundational review. It had a more general focus that looked at which post-secondary model would be most feasible for the territory and what benefits it could provide for the city.

The city study endorses the polytechnic university as a better choice for the NWT than a college. Some of the advantages are greater academic and governance independence, access to a wider pool of teaching talent, the ability to maximize enrolment by offering both theoretical and applied learning, and lastly, a better alignment with northern labour needs.

That is not all. Polytechnics have higher graduation employment rates than colleges and universities generally and attract more international students, given comprehensive marketing. All of these benefits would reverse the trends of declining enrolments and graduation rates that Aurora College is experiencing right now. A polytechnic is not only feasible; it is the best way forward.

Mr. Speaker, the elephant in the room is the question of where the main polytechnic campus will be located. Both the foundational review and the city study recommended that the campus be built in Yellowknife, because it has the greatest range of services. Of course, Fort Smith does not want to give up its place as the headquarters of Aurora College, along with all of the employment it provides.

In an effort to collaborate, the mayors of the three communities with Aurora College campuses issued a news release last month, endorsing the creation of a polytechnic university in the NWT. They also asked the GNWT not to make a decision that would be detrimental to any NWT community.

Mr. Speaker, this is obviously a challenge. There may be distance learning options that make a large central campus less relevant, but at the end of the day the new institution's administration and support services need to have a physical location. That means government has to make a choice, a political choice, and the stakes are high. It's my view that, the sooner this choice is made, the better. It's difficult for communities to plan their future, create additional housing for students, and for the territorial government to seek funding if the location of the polytechnic is unknown. I will have questions for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Mahsi.