

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

REFLECTIONS ON THE NORTHERN HOUSING SUMMIT

May 23, 2019

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, colleagues. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to offer my reflections on the housing summit hosted by the NWT Housing Corporation in Inuvik last month. I appreciate the invitation to attend.

The summit confirmed several key points, most of which were long known.

First, there is a shortage of social housing in most communities. The waiting lists are long, especially for single people, and they may spend years waiting for a place to live. The Housing Corporation is unable to keep up with the demand.

Second, there are some significant barriers to attracting tenants to home ownership. Most tenants have lower-than-average income that does not stretch far enough for high power and fuel prices and exorbitant insurance costs in small communities.

Third, housing is often designed, situated, and regulated without input from community members.

Mr. Speaker, there is a ray of hope, and that is the Community Housing Support Initiative. This program helps communities help themselves by funding projects that are jointly developed by local governments and the Housing Corporation. The program is flexible enough that the local government can combine it with other GNWT programs to pay the cost of labour, for example. This program has the potential to deliver benefits to more communities, but it needs increased investment by the Housing Corporation to make it more widely available. Trickle in three or four new houses a year is obviously just not enough. It will never catch up.

While there was some agreement on issues, there is still some uncertainty about solutions. The Housing Corporation continues to promote home ownership despite pushback on costs. Historically, few people have taken up this opportunity. People who get into social housing tend to stay there as renters. There is very little movement because people fear that, if they move, they will lose their housing and start over with the waiting list.

Mr. Speaker, housing is the basis of social health. Without adequate housing, all other efforts at improving social conditions are hampered. In the mandate for this Assembly, we agreed to increase the availability of safe, affordable housing. Given what we heard in Inuvik, we are not there yet. We are not even close. The Housing Corporation committed to developing a plan to go with the new federal housing strategy dollars that will lead the way, and I look forward to seeing it. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.