

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

NEED FOR ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

August 14, 2019

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about the urgent need to accelerate the economic diversification of our economy. Members learned this lesson during the first week of this Assembly, when De Beers told us they plan to close the Snap Lake diamond mine. It was a timely reminder that all the diamond mines are forecasted to close in the next 10 years, starting at the end of the 19th Assembly. There may be ways to extend the life of each of them, but their best days are probably done.

Mr. Speaker, there is no ready replacement for diamond mining and the benefits it provides. This is a particular worry for residents whose development corporations provide training and work at the mines; Det'on Cho Corporation, for example, employs nearly 1,000 people in its own companies and joint ventures. The last thing any of us wants to see is most of these people out of work, but there are few alternatives in this area, except for the Giant Mine remediation. Clearly, it's time to ramp up our economic diversification efforts.

Yesterday the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment told us it's all good, but the fact is that the government has not made investment and diversification a priority. In fact, there is less money being spent on it in this budget than there was two years ago. Some industries are thriving anyway. Spending by tourists has doubled since 2012 and government support has gone up, too, but it's still peanuts compared to the support that is needed. Most glaring is government's failure to invest in new visitor services in Yellowknife. There is a road to the Arctic Ocean, but no campgrounds there. How is the government helping Whati prepare for an influx of visitors?

Business is leading the way with services, but it's up to government to provide the necessary infrastructure. This investment would benefit communities throughout the NWT, creating jobs and revenue. We know from the 100,000-plus visitors who travelled to the Northwest Territories in 2017-2018 that they are interested in the North's unique culture and landscapes, but are often stuck for a place to camp or stay or get out on the water. Where is the action on that?

Mr. Speaker, the government has a track record of backing the big at the expense of the small, but there is no reason to sneer at the small enterprises that will create a broader economic base, greater stability, greater employment for dollar of input and greater economic multiplier for dollar earned. These jobs won't look so small when the diamond mines have closed. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.