

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

EVOLUTION OF AURORA COLLEGE

August 22, 2019

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. One of the most remarkable transformations to take place in the life of this Assembly is the approach to post-secondary education, in general, and Aurora College, in particular. Our mandate directed us to expand opportunities for post-secondary education, not to dismiss the Aurora College board, order a foundational review, and make plans to establish a polytechnic university, but that's what has happened and we are better off for it.

The government's decision to cut the college's budget started this transformation. It took weeks of questioning to understand that this was a government decision following a college recommendation. The evidence supporting the cuts shifted several times from the cost of delivery, to the small number of graduates, to the quality of the programs themselves. It's worth remembering the college decided to evaluate the social work program after the decision had been made to chop it. I look forward to the day when it will be reinstated to help meet the objectives of the Child and Family Services Plan introduced this week.

Mr. Speaker, the foundational review was a good idea poorly executed. The consultation was wholly inadequate and, as a result, some of the conclusions were questionable; but it did plant a seed that a polytechnic university is the publicly funded post-secondary institution we both need and want. I want to say that it's unfortunate that the foundational review has caused so much distress in Fort Smith in spite of the Minister's efforts to reassure the community about its continuing importance to post-secondary education.

Since the report came out, many people have taken a turn watering the polytechnic seed, including the City of Yellowknife with its own study of the economic benefits of having a college here in the capital. Meanwhile the department has been busy with the strategic framework tabled this week, setting up an advisory council and preparing for a strategic plan.

Mr. Speaker, this week we passed the Post-Secondary Education Act. This is a solid achievement for everyone who wants to live and learn in the Northwest Territories. It sets us up to establish quality institutions offering transferable credits, and provide for the educated workforce we need now and into the future. It is the foundation of the knowledge economy that we want to continue to develop.

If anyone had told me all this good would come from all the disruptive and apparently arbitrary decisions made two-and-a-half years ago, I would have had trouble believing it. My hope is that the 19th Assembly will continue on the course now set for a promising future. Mahsi.