

MEMBER'S STATEMENT — JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
ALCOHOL STRATEGY

February 26, 2020

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I was delighted to learn this month that the Department of Health and Social Services has started work on an alcohol strategy. Alcohol abuse is a problem that touches all our lives, often with tragic consequences.

I'm going to summarize Harold Johnson's story of tackling the harm alcohol is doing to his First Nation. Mr. Johnson is Cree from Montreal Lake in Saskatchewan. He is a Harvard-educated lawyer who still works on his family's trap line. He has seen firsthand that alcohol is responsible for the vast majority of injuries and deaths in his community. In his book titled "Firewater, How Alcohol is Killing My People and Yours," he asks: "Given all we know about alcohol, its harm to the health of our bodies, our families, our communities, why aren't we doing more, something, about it?"

Mr. Johnson reviews a variety of models for dealing with alcohol abuse before coming to some important conclusions. First, he calls the courts "alcohol aftermath administrators." They can't solve alcohol abuse because it's not a legal problem. Second, he notes that outside treatment centres have roughly a 6-percent success rate. He says: "Somehow, we have to turn our communities into treatment centres so that the whole community becomes involved in finding healthy alternatives." Third, he says, banning alcohol doesn't work because bootleggers control the supply, and police efforts to curb them are largely unsuccessful.

Mr. Speaker, his final point is his most important. He believes that we make change by setting an example as sober leaders. He says: "If leadership behaves responsibly, is not involved in scandal, works diligently for the betterment of the people, and creates a story of dignity and morals, then people will see that and participate in the story." Mr. Johnson and others have started work, or did start work four years ago, on a community alcohol management plan. Local leadership decided on actions, including enhanced support for treatment and hosting more alcohol-free events. Early indicators are that emergency room visits and impaired driving rates have both dropped. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement. Thank you. ---Unanimous consent granted

MS. GREEN: Thank you, colleagues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An alcohol strategy is not a magic bullet. Sober leaders working with community agencies have made a positive start on alcohol harm reduction in northern Saskatchewan, and we can, too. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Mahsi.