

MEMBER'S STATEMENT — JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
COVID-19 AND SUPPORT FOR TOURISM

March 16, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The coronavirus pandemic is swiftly moving and unpredictable. A little more than a month ago, I spoke about the effect of coronavirus on tourism in the NWT, based on the Chinese government directive to halt group travel. Now, travel by almost everyone in the northern hemisphere to almost anywhere in the world is not advised by public health officials. Of course, that includes travel to and from the NWT from outside of Canada. New arrivals will be asked to self-quarantine for two weeks.

Mr. Speaker, visitors are listening to the call to stay home. They have cancelled hotels and car rentals, especially in Yellowknife. Meanwhile there is less to do here as festival planners heed the call of social distancing and cancel their events. We are looking at significant losses to non-profits, such as the Snowking Festival and the Long John Jamboree, and to businesses of all sizes because of this disruption. There are indirect effects as well; a loss of business for day-tour operators, restaurants, and stores. Given what we know about this public health emergency, things are going to get worse before they get better.

Mr. Speaker, some tourism operators in the NWT are waving the white flag. They are worried whether their businesses will also become casualties of the pandemic. The chair of NWT Tourism is asking government for help. Among his requests is stimulus funding to help the tourism industry once the pandemic is over, support for employers with staff using immigration programs to earn permanent residency status, and support for seasonal workers who earn most of their income in the summer.

Mr. Speaker, when I last raised this issue, a month ago, the Minister of Industry Tourism and Investment said it would be fall before she had a clear picture of the season. It is clear now that that response is totally inadequate. Last year, the NWT earned \$210 million in tourism revenue, with about a third of that coming from aurora tourism. Assistance to tour operators and efforts to market the NWT as a destination will have to kick in much sooner. I will have questions for the Premier. Mahsi.