

# **MLA JULIE GREEN – YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE – IN THE MEDIA**

## **Campaign schools played key role in gender parity, MLAs say** **By: Nick Pearce**

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Cover Page:



Caption: The female members of the 19th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories gathered in the lobby March 5 to chat about International Women's Day, which was March 8. Pictured are minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment and minister of Infrastructure Katrina Nokleby, left, minister of Housing and minister of Municipal and Community Affairs Paulie Chinna, Thebacha MLA Frieda Martselos, minister of Justice and minister of Finance Caroline Wawzonek, Kam Lake MLA Caitlin Cleveland, Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green, Premier Caroline Cochrane, deputy premier and minister of Health and Social Services Diane Thom and chair of the Committee of the Whole, Inuvik Twin Lakes MLA Lesa Semmler.

## **Campaign schools played key role in gender parity, MLAs say**

*Cabinet ministers, regular members share peaks and pitfalls in their runs for office*

On March 5, MLAs celebrated International Women's Day early as the only legislature in Canada with near gender parity.

Speaking in the house Thursday, members gave emotional tributes to their mothers and mentors. Premier Caroline Cochrane recognized her single mother's work raising eight children. Minister Katrina Nokleby did the same, while sharing her experiences of sexual misconduct and sexism on the job site as an engineer.

"If it weren't for (my mother) holding my hand over the years, I wouldn't be standing here in front of you today," she told MLAs.

Kam Lake MLA Caitlin Cleveland and cabinet minister Paulie Chinna, who represents the Sahtu, took a different route: they thanked Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green, who pioneered NWT's Women on the Ballot workshops with Cochrane.

It was part of the reason they sought office, they said.

### **Workshops**

At those workshops, Green said women came forward with confidence concerns, but also more tangible issues – like how to pay for a campaign and write a platform.

Those skills, ultimately, are what will solidify the last election's gains, she said in an interview.

"If we can offer specific advice at the time, and follow-up with mentoring, then the whole process looks a little bit more achievable," she said, noting other jurisdictions expressed interest in the workshop model.

Those workshops are set to grow, running twice yearly and expanding to five additional communities to promote woman candidates at all levels of government with an added online resource, Cochrane said in assembly on March 4.

It's a leg-up, Green said, considering men can enjoy a pipeline from lower levels of government to territorial and federal offices. As a result, she hoped that women elected to municipal and educational offices would make the next step to the legislature.

Other factors played into a wave of women being elected. The self-nomination process with no political party approval played a role, Green said.

But the institution has also made small changes. It now includes change tables and family space, and other supports like stronger parental leave and childcare for extenuating circumstances.

There are other changes that NWT could adopt, Green said. A security policy, while not an issue so far, could be implemented as a preventative measure for women in politics.

"I do recognize that women have run the gamut from harassment online to actually being murdered as politicians, so that's something we need to consider," she said.

In a group interview after their comments on Thursday afternoon, female cabinet ministers and Inuvik Twin Lakes MLA Lesa Semmler shared their experience running for office. Three of them – Nokleby, deputy premier and Health Minister Dianne Thom, and Semmler said they attended the campaign schools.

The schools' most important impact, however, "was the encouragement of other women," Nokleby said, which she described as "overwhelming."

Chinna, who Green has also mentored, saw Thom and Semmler put their names forward last summer, which inspired her to run.

"We're all, majority, part of the same generation," she said. "Going forward and looking at what we want to strive for as the Northwest Territories as women in leadership to inspire more women to come forward."

### **'Three strikes across our back'**

Thom said there were "three strikes across our backs" – being a woman, Indigenous and educated.

"You start in here and you're already three strikes on your back and it's so hard to come past that," she said. "But that kind of motivates us. It motivated me. I've got a master's degree, I'm Inuvialuit, and I'm female. I don't care. I'm going to go do this."

Despite that, however, Thom said faced self-doubt and support from her husband played a key role overcoming it.

Cochrane agreed that men should play a role in supporting their counterparts for office.

"However, that shouldn't stop women who are single, that do not have a support system," she said. "Women deserve to be at the table. You can do it."

Semmler similarly said her biggest enemy was self-confidence. She thought she had to check every box to be a candidate, when men didn't do the same.

"I think that's the difference between some women and a lot of men. They'll just throw their hand in and say, we'll see where the cards fall," she said. "We're more like 'can we do it? How am I going to do this?'"

Coming from a smaller community, Chinna agreed. Like other women from smaller communities, she said, they had experience with ground level issues that could be a resource.

"We do have a lot set up against us already. I think it just ignites us to get even more powerful that it wakes up that passion inside. There's no intimidation," she said. "We need to get the job done. We hear it, we see it and we're going to do it."