

MEMBER'S STATEMENT — JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

MURAL BY WALT HUMPHRIES

May 29, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Almost 30 years ago, an artist who now lives in my constituency spent two months painting a giant mural for the Stanton Territorial Hospital. The picture shows a variety of people standing on the shore of Frame Lake looking across at what was then the new hospital. It's a favourite of many staff and patients who describe it as comforting. The mural stood on the edge of the hospital parking lot until construction of yet another new hospital began four years ago. It was taken away for safe keeping, then this spring, it reappeared as the snow melted, lying face up on a gravel pile.

A former Stanton employee has said when the mural was first removed, it was standing up in a safe location. He believes the mural was moved again last because of the work being done on the old hospital. Having the picture lying down had the potential to create water damage to it and fade the painting's colours.

Mr. Speaker, Walt Humphries was understandably furious that his art and his efforts are held in such low esteem by the government. After a week of behind the scenes efforts to have government acknowledge its responsibility to rescue the mural and store it properly, public pressure has prompted the Department of Infrastructure to move the mural inside until plans are finalized to put it back up on the Stanton campus.

Mr. Speaker, a similar situation exists in Hay River. The old HH Williams Hospital had a well-known mural inside. I understand plans are being made to relocate it prior to demolishing that building.

Mr. Speaker, these situations raise questions about the chain of custody for artwork. Who is responsible for the care, maintenance, and appropriate storage of the art that the government acquires? I will have questions for the Minister of either Infrastructure or Education, Culture and Employment. Thank you.