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**The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker**

# Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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**Hon. Shane Thompson**  
**(Nahendeh)**

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**YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES****Friday, May 24, 2024****Members Present**

Hon. Caitlin Cleveland, Mr. Edjericon, Mr. Hawkins, Hon. Lucy Kuptana, Hon. Jay Macdonald, Hon. Vince McKay, Mr. McNeely, Ms. Morgan, Mr. Morse, Mr. Nerysoo, Ms. Reid, Mr. Rodgers, Hon. Lesa Semmler, Hon. R.J. Simpson, Mr. Testart, Mr. Thompson, Mrs. Weyallon Armstrong, Hon. Caroline Wawzonek, Mrs. Yakeleya

The House met at 10:01 a.m.

**Prayer**

---Prayer

**SPEAKER (Hon. Shane Thompson):** I'd like to thank Karen Mitchell for the opening guiding words for us today.

Colleagues, yesterday I was a very bad grandpa. I forgot to wish my grandson Freddie Vanderheyden a Happy 12th Birthday yesterday. So I would like to wish him a Happy Belated 12th Birthday. As well, tomorrow my better half's grandson and Danielle -- her daughter's Danielle son Scott Eggen is also turning 12. So we have two boys that have birthdays really close together, and they both live in Calgary. So wishing him a happy birthday.

On behalf of the Members from Hay River South and Hay River North, I'd like to welcome the grade 6 class from Ms. Hoss' class at Princess Alexandra School in Hay River to the gallery today, and welcome. Thank you very much for being here.

Now, folks, the reason why we're all here, the Minister of Finance.

**Budget Address**

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Mr. Speaker, with this first budget of the 20th Legislative Assembly, we are changing how we deliver on priorities in a way that is realistic, responsible, and always with an eye on being financially ready for whatever the future might bring.

In February, we released a fiscal strategy for this government to help restore long-term stability in our budgets. This first budget is step one in the drive for fiscal improvement. What's new in 2024-2025 are a series of simple but measurable changes to ensure solid fiscal fundamentals today, while we help the Northwest Territories build for the future through this Assembly's vision to support people in how they want to live, work, and grow with priorities focused on housing, a strong

economic foundation, accessible health care, healing from trauma, and safe residents and communities. This vision will be achieved with good governance and collaboration with Northwest Territories residents, Indigenous governments, and all communities.

The recent flooding and wildfire events have strained our fiscal capacity, one where expenditures already historically exceeded government revenues. The Government of the Northwest Territories has a responsibility to ensure that it can always respond to emergencies and provide support in times of emergency events. That responsibility rests on leadership today, not with our children who will be the leadership of tomorrow. We must move forward responsibly now to sustain an environment where our future generations can enjoy a healthy and safe North.

As a whole of government, we must also work to achieve the priorities established by the Assembly. In many cases, we can do so through existing department budgets and positions rather than by adding new expenditures or growth to the size of the future public service. As such, this is not a ribbon-cutting budget. This is a practical and realistic budget aimed at reducing our overall expenditures in 2024-2025 to help meet the benchmarks we set to both restore balance and increase our fiscal capacity to deal with unexpected events. In this budget address, I will review our economic and fiscal situation, describe what we have done to set ourselves on a path towards stronger fiscal responsibility, and highlight work being done this year to deliver on the government's mandate.

Overall, we are delivering a \$2.2-billion budget that represents difficult choices to achieve targets included in the government's fiscal strategy. We are not meeting our full target of \$150 million in savings this year because this was never intended to be an austerity budget or cuts for the sake of cuts. We will need to continue to work towards that ongoing target in 2025-2026. This budget is about value and efficiency, not just reductions, and always mindful of the responsibility to achieve the priorities set by the Assembly. We have reduced funding for some programs and, in

many cases, added the savings elsewhere so that we are delivering on these priorities faster and smarter.

[Translation] in our budget, we need not ignore the economic situation of the government, nor the government's role in establishing a solid basis for the economy. Once again, the government has a role to play in provide a solid economic basis for each resident, business, and other organization within the territory. [Translation ends].

...potential across the territory. We are all aware that the economy will soon be going through a significant change as the first closure of our world-class diamond mines is expected in less than two years, and this will have a noticeable effect on the economy. These mines are at the center of many of the economic relationships that exist throughout the territory. How we respond to the first closure is a key point of discussion for the territory. This closure should be a call to action to motivate collective efforts to support a strong economic foundation.

When the diamond mines opened some 25 years ago, there was much talk about training and capacity building and yet we are still struggling with a resident labour workforce that is statistically at full employment even though some communities have high unemployment, and opportunities continue to leak outside our borders or cannot be seized for lack of workers to support business expansion. But we are not short of opportunities.

The imminent closure of one large diamond mine is concerning, but the other two have socio-economic agreements that set targets for northern hires that the mines struggle to meet. This suggests that the other mines should be well placed to receive northern workers.

More good news is that the Northwest Territories has a wealth of mineral deposits that are gaining attention as the world seeks new technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and which rely on critical minerals and metals. Mineral exploration in the territory has increased every year since the pandemic and 2023 investments were at their highest level in 15 years. Based on the survey of exploration intentions, we are expecting that 2024 spending will exceed 2023. We need to ready our workforce, enhance transportation and energy corridors, and shore up our business environment to turn this exploration into production.

We now have some of the largest remediation projects in the history of this country happening in the Northwest Territories, nation-building scale infrastructure projects in transportation

and energy are advancing, and opportunities rising across a diversity of economic sectors.

A strong economic foundation requires a diversified economy to reduce the risks created by outside events beyond our control. We all want a territory where people are supported in how they want to live and work and, in this budget, we are answering the call to deliver on our role and responsibilities such as less red tape, transparent processes to create land access, education and training for the current and future labour force, supporting increased housing, and providing good health care for a productive workforce. We are focusing on strengthening our collaborative approach to economic development, such as working with Indigenous governments on land-use planning and community partners on regional economic plans so that residents, businesses, and industry can take the lead finding opportunities that are in demand and creating rewarding jobs.

Through the Government Renewal Initiative and strengthened adherence to a renewed Macroeconomic Policy Framework, we can ensure we find the best value for public funds including supporting entrepreneurship and risk-taking in the private sector.

The Northwest Territories job market already has a low unemployment rate and a high level of job vacancies. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment budget supports its 2021-2025 Skills 4 Success action plan and is working towards an annual target of 75 net new child care spaces to increase the availability of licensed spaces to give more child caregivers the choice to participate in the workforce.

The pandemic is further in the past for the tourism industry as the number of operators and aircraft movements are back up to pre-pandemic levels. With government support, the commercial fishery sector looks poised for growth under the revitalization strategy and with higher prices and more people fishing commercially in 2023.

[Translation] households continue to lead in the country per capital and household savings rates remain higher than any province. Recent capital investments have rejuvenated the infrastructure asset base across industries, making improvements in energy, health facilities, public works and utilities, and transportation infrastructure. Underpinning these economic strengths will be a fiscally sustainable territorial government that helps provide people and businesses confidence to invest in the Northwest Territories. [Translation ends].

The territory continues to have a solid economic base to build on. Income, savings, and investments that are fundamental to economic sustainability and prosperity are present. The Northwest Territories is a great place to live and the resilience and creativity of residents and businesses will help capitalize on opportunities. However, the Government needs to get fiscal house in order and keep it that way to continue to remain a supportive economic partner with the capacity to deliver quality programs and investments in infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has fiscal resources, but we do not want to be using public revenues to pay \$30 million a year servicing debt. Our budget is based on the fundamental principle that we do not borrow for programs and services offered today and push those expenditures to future taxpayers. That is why the Fiscal Responsibility Policy makes it clear that we will not borrow for the operating budget but only borrow for investments in capital assets that benefit future generations.

With this budget, we are projecting a \$294-million operating surplus for 2024-2025, which includes \$110 million in federal disaster relief assistance for recent flooding and fire costs. This surplus is the largest projected operating surplus in 25 years, however, to get us on track to have our long-term fiscal house in order, this projected surplus must fund the 2024-2025 capital plan of \$268 million as well as start to allocate money towards paying down our debt. This means that as we go through the fiscal year, when new needs or opportunities arise, we will be asking departments to find funding from within existing budgets instead of asking for new money. Departments are also being asked to carefully evaluate what they can do without or, put another way, to budget within what they already have.

Our revenue forecast is increased two percent from 2023-2024 to reach \$2.6 billion. Keeping to our fiscal strategy, we are holding the growth in departmental expenditures below that of revenues. The 2024-2025 operating budget is \$2.2 billion, which is only \$24 million higher than last year's budget and growth of one percent. If we combine the operating and capital budgets, we will spend almost \$2.6 billion.

For this year, we are proposing \$7.7 million in initiatives, including \$3.1 million carried over from initiatives started in the previous Assembly.

Barring a repeat of last year's expenditure shocks, the projected 2024-2025 operating surplus will fund the entire capital plan this year, and we are expecting to reduce short-term

borrowing by \$34 million by March 31, 2025. We are not done yet. We stay committed to reach our target of a \$150-million reduction in short-term debt by the end of the Assembly. The 2024-2025 Budget exceeds the guidelines in the Fiscal Responsibility Policy, keeping debt affordable and below the federally-imposed borrowing limit.

As we embarked on our efforts for fiscal sustainability, we asked departments to review and categorize all of their programs, including those required by legislation, for public safety, or core to the department's mandates. We asked who benefitted from various programs and whether a program is connected to this Assembly's priorities. From this exercise, we have accepted \$100 million in combined revenue increases and expenditure adjustments for this budget.

[Translation] Mr. Speaker, Budget 2024-2025 shows our commitment to restoring balance to our finances by ensuring our resources are used in a manner that is efficient and directed towards policies and programs that are achieving the objectives set by the Assembly. Our focus is on managing spending growth and now, more than ever, reinforcing the cultural shift started through the Government Renewal Initiative to ensure that we get value for every dollar we invest in delivering programs and services. [Translation ends].

Expenditure management that is not done in a thoughtful way can have implications for future program and service delivery. That is why we are proposing to add \$42 million in additional program spending to support increased program costs.

Key cost pressures that we need to address in the fiscal strategy are related to spending pressures in health and the low water levels that are challenging for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation and Marine Transportation Services.

Over the next year, we will put shared efforts to ensure health spending remains within its budget. Health spending is a third of our operating budget and consistently requires top-ups throughout the year. In 2023-2024 alone, health spending is projected to be \$64 million higher than budgeted. We are proposing to add \$37 million to the Department of Health and Social Services' 2024-2025 Budget that reflects the additional needs identified over the past year and to identify a right-sized budget that will help provide stability to our health care services.

We are mitigating the high cost of living with \$30 million to help keep power rates stable. As

a regulated utility, the Northwest Territories Power Corporation has little room to avoid passing the increased costs resulting from unprecedented low water to ratepayers, and so the government will step in to help fill this emergency gap. This is an example of why we must maintain fiscal capacity into the future to be able to support residents through extreme or unprecedented events.

Managing expenditure growth also means that we have the resources to focus on the government's priorities. Operating expenditures are being reduced by \$156 million this year, including \$48 million in savings through the fiscal strategy measures. These savings are offset by \$168 million in program enhancements and adjustments. Since much of the program increases reflect past flood and wildfire recovery costs, this spending will be eliminated in future years.

The public service has grown far faster than the private sector over the past few years. This means not only significantly increased public cost but also has implications for the availability of labour to the private sector. We need to look carefully at this growth. That said, the programs and services that we are expected to deliver across the geographic expanse of the territory rely on a strong public service; and therefore, any fiscal sustainability efforts that considered eliminating positions looked first at vacant positions or opportunities for attrition. For positions that may be affected, the government is fully committed to the retention of any affected employees and every effort will be made to retain employees within the public service. We have been very effective at placing affected employees in the past, and we are confident we will have similar results this time. Our public service is the government's greatest asset, and we will continue to ensure that the Government of the Northwest Territories is a welcoming and attractive workplace.

As noted, the fiscal sustainability actions proposed in this budget will not be enough to achieve the fiscal strategy we set out. We have deliberately not forced immediate cost neutrality in program and service delivery, particularly in health services delivery, because we are realistic about the challenges involved in doing a fulsome review of spending and are determined that we will accomplish this task by seeking efficiencies, avoiding duplication, and redeploying what is not working to that which does provide value.

Mr. Speaker, I take pride that this budget is not about what we are spending more on but, rather, how we are spending smarter. Departments are finding savings and

innovating services within their existing budgets.

We currently spend millions of dollars to run the Fort Smith Correctional Complex that has capacity for 21 inmates but on average only has ten. We are planning to close it but not simply walk away from a valuable asset with well trained staff. Over the coming months, the government will examine how this asset could be repurposed into a wellness centre. To do so might ultimately require some reinvestment for renovations but, to not do so, leaves us spending money that is not effective or efficient. This is an example of connecting the dots between an inefficient use of public funds to areas of need that reflect the priorities of the Assembly. The Department of Justice, in collaboration with other departments, will begin this work immediately and we will be seeking out other opportunities to redeploy existing infrastructure to better meet the needs of the Northwest Territories.

Justice is also using technology to enhance policing services, save money, and reduce risk. For example, Justice will complete its project to provide 19 RCMP detachments with the capability to hold bail appearances online. This will allow RCMP members to spend more time in their home communities and make more effective use of their time and resources.

Through the Department of Finance, we are using technology to save almost \$700,000 each year by upgrading the phone system, simplifying video conferencing equipment and software with less expensive options, and taking advantage of our scale for other types of software that was used in one department and is now applied in another. Finance is home to the Northwest Territories Centre of Geomatics, which is working with other departments and communities to provide flood mapping data, geospatial data for land-use planning, and operational tools for emergency management and response.

Mr. Speaker, we will be the first government in the country to partner with the federal IT Apprenticeship Program for Indigenous peoples, with Finance spearheading a memorandum of understanding with Employment and Social Development Canada, to provide opportunities for Indigenous candidates to participate from their home communities and gain meaningful employment with the government while taking advantage of training and support resources offered through this federal program.

Drug therapies and their unit costs are substantial sources of spending pressure, and the Department of Health and Social Services



has been working with counterparts across Canada to secure product listing agreements with drug manufacturers for rebates under the Extended Health Benefits program. This approach has proven a successful cost-saving measure and in this past year, the department has secured several drug agreements using the chemotherapy program, giving us access to most drugs used in the treatment at a lower cost. With treatment therapies continuing to change and new drugs coming to market regularly, these efforts help keep pace with growing demand. Health and social services will be seeking further drug agreements for other treatments and services this year.

The Department of Environment and Climate Change is successful in this budget to fund innovative programs and projects without requesting new funding by securing \$20 million in federal funds. Most of these agreements are multi-year and will be used for programs related to wildlife, conservation, wildfire prevention and mitigation, emergency management, climate change, and waters. Partnering with the departments of Finance and Municipal and Community Affairs, the department is implementing the Land Operations Tenure System, which is an integrated database for delivering land tenure and property assessment and tax services to reduce the administrative burden for clients. The department will also be optimizing its recent merger to ensure it is yielding efficiency gains.

The departments of Executive and Indigenous Affairs and Education, Culture and Employment are committed to advancing integrated service delivery for improved coordination and information sharing among different strategies for homelessness, anti-poverty, reduced alcohol abuse, and improving food security.

The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs has found resources within its existing budget to create a junior property assessor program to encourage individuals interested in assessment to join the workforce and learn on the job. By 2027-2028, the department aims to fill three junior assessor jobs that will help ensure that properties are accurately assessed for property tax purposes.

I want to give a special thank you to the over 900 public servants who sent in over 1,800 individual suggestions to help deliver better value with public funds. We are already acting on many of these suggestions in this budget.

For example, we will be consolidating immigration policy into Education, Culture and Employment, which will improve accessibility to the Northwest Territories nominee program. The various programs offering support to the

arts sector will be consolidated into the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment. Both of these actions bring government services under one department for a single point of contact rather than spread between staff in different departments and is expected to result in a better service experience. Similarly, there were many suggestions about reviewing assistance provided to businesses and non-government organizations to ensure they are consistent. Industry, Tourism and Investment will act on these ideas by centralizing business supports. The Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs will lead streamlining assistance for non-governmental organization funding for ease of access to user groups and ease of reporting for transparency.

Another example is Infrastructure's Technology Service Centre merger with Finance's Information Systems Shared Services Client Care desk. Bringing together employees working within similar spheres is expected to increase productivity and help improve the quality of program delivery.

Based on employee suggestions, we will also be examining our portfolio of assets, specifically leases and vehicles, to maximize use of our government-wide resources this fiscal year. This will include a review of existing leased space to make better use of that space, reduce our overall footprint, and ultimately reduce costs. Alongside this work will be an evaluation of the remote work policy to assess its effectiveness in support of employee productivity and morale because changing the spaces we work in needs to be a positive opportunity for flexibility. We will be charting a path towards centralized mobile fleet management. This work will take some time and likely involve some cost to initially set up but will ultimately replace an inefficient and expensive approach of underused vehicles and poor economies of scale for procurement.

Again, there is no ribbon cutting in those changes, but we are committed to listening to those delivering programs and services and committed to making programs and services more responsive and effective in achieving the goals of the Assembly without new dollars needed.

While we are indeed curtailing spending growth, the good news is that we are confident that future expenditure management will justify adding \$4.6 million in new spending in 2024-2025.

The new spending in this budget reflects the government's mandate to achieve the priorities set by the 20th Assembly. We propose an

additional \$793,000 to support the transition to a green economy with resources dedicated to the Energy Action Plan and building a fast-charging network for electric vehicles in the territory.

The government continues the collaborative work to complete the Mineral Resources Act regulations with a proposed \$393,000 to finish the final step in bringing the legislation into force. We are collaborating with the Intergovernmental Council to ensure the regulations under development are comprehensive and are reaching out to other Indigenous governments for their participation.

We want to build on the success of the territory as a destination for filmmakers to embrace the opportunities, that the ever-growing global demand for video and media content offers, to showcase the territory's nature and beauty. We propose to add \$529,000 to increase the Northwest Territories Film and Media Strategy's Film Rebate Program. This program helps with high production costs and supports the Northwest Territories Film Commission. Since 2015, every dollar spent under the rebate program has been associated with almost nine dollars spent in the territory on production.

We are also proposing in this budget to contribute a new one million dollars to Housing Northwest Territories to continue the cost-sharing agreement for the Canada-NWT Housing Benefit that provides rental affordability assistance to low-income households. We expect to continue this for two more years and enable a total of \$9.6 million in federal and territorial support over three years to help keep rents affordable for Northwest Territories residents.

Housing is also a key element to support success in addictions. We are proposing to spend \$1.6 million on the Transitional Housing Addictions Recovery Program that is administered through the departments of Health and Social Services and Infrastructure in partnership with Housing NWT. The program is expected to have locations open this year in Yellowknife and Inuvik, in collaboration with non-profit organizations, to ensure units are available for people returning from treatment to have a safe and supported place to continue a journey towards health and wellness.

These additional funds support an operating budget of over \$121 million for Housing NWT. However, we recognize that no one entity or government will be able to solve the housing crisis alone. As a result, Housing NWT is focusing on the various levels of partnership required to ensure that there is funding available to leverage but also coordination

across governments on all aspects of the housing continuum without unnecessary duplication. For example, Housing NWT has now signed four agreements with Indigenous governments to signal not only our commitment to working with each Indigenous government but also to identify the key areas of focus on our work with each individual government. Another example is a partnership with Habitat for Humanity which will result in over 10 builds completed by 2028, and this model is being expanded to more and more communities.

With a more focused fiscal approach, every department can direct their core work towards shared priorities without requiring new funding. Housing is a prime example. Executive and Indigenous Affairs is supporting the delivery of the homelessness strategy, Environment and Climate Change is working to support access to land for housing development, and Municipal and Community Affairs is supporting land-use planning for housing development. As well, the Department of Finance is supporting a housing market needs assessment using existing internal resources to provide territorial data on the type and sizes of homes required to meet the needs for all residents in the Northwest Territories. The assessment will rely on a model used by other jurisdictions which will support not only our federal engagement strategy but also other work with partner organizations in addressing the various needs across the housing continuum in the Northwest Territories.

[Translation] In this budget, in support of the priority for safe residents and communities, we propose the budget put a total \$815,000 more into public safety for more relief staffing in the 9-1-1 program and dedicated specialists in high-risk areas, including emergency management. These positions will directly help keep residents and communities informed during emergencies and ensure that there is an adequate complement of staff at the receiving end of an emergency call. [Translation ends].

In addition, this budget also includes funds to improve the ability of the RCMP to support public safety. We are proposing to create a \$1.3 million Territorial Crime Reduction Unit that will serve the entire territory with specialized resources to support investigations and proactive enforcement aimed at disrupting illicit drug supply and enhancing enforcement of targeting criminal networks. We are proposing to add \$372,000 this budget and \$744,000 annually in future budgets to enhance the RCMP Emergency Response Team, comprising officers with advanced training and equipment, who will assist in the successful resolution of dangerous situations. This budget will also add four new officer positions in regions across the Northwest Territories

through the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program, and two additional general duty officer positions at the Fort Providence detachment.

Directly after this budget, departments will start the process to develop next year's budget and the 2025-2026 Capital Budget this fall. Year two of this Assembly will require more work to restore balance to our fiscal situation. We are looking to continue the drive for fiscal improvement and encourage the culture of continuous evaluation that will give us confidence that we are getting value for dollars spent.

Mr. Speaker, it takes imagination to answer our need for fiscal sustainability while still delivering on the government's mandate responsibilities. With all certainty, we are stronger together. It is beyond doubt that Northerners can pull together for whatever challenges they face.

The response by the public service to the call for making changes is all the evidence we need to be confident that we have a culture of creativity, determination to embrace change, and a spirit of continual improvement.

I want to thank all the Members of the Assembly for the work we have done together to provide a set of priorities that is focused and clear, as well as for all of the discussions had to date about this budget as a step towards achieving those priorities. I am also grateful for the correspondence and discussions from residents, governments, organizations, and our civil service that have helped shape a budget that delivers in a fiscally responsible way.

Mr. Speaker, we have set a foundation to effect change. We must ensure that the Northwest Territories is positioned to take advantage of opportunities while we continue to build upon our successes. Fiscal policies and strategies designed to manage debt and risks effectively ensure the longevity of our programs, build these foundations. We are dedicated to doing things the right way, with positive relationships, seizing our economic advantages, and embracing opportunities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Finance. We will take a brief recess, and then we will come back to deal with our daily business. So thank you very much and thank you to the Office of the Executive Finance Minister. And the interpreters thank you for slowing down a little bit, thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thanks for the brief break. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Monfwi.

### Members' Statements

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT 167-20(1): RECOGNITION OF GRACE MACKENZIE

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize and celebrate the achievement of the Tlicho women. As women, we face more barriers when building our careers. Most often, it is the woman who balances the needs of children and family with the demands of work. And for women who pursue employment in mining, there are even more challenges as they navigate a male-dominated field.

Mr. Speaker, Indigenous employees at NWT mines represent between 16 and 18 percent of the total employees. Women represent 15.3 percent of the mining industry in the NWT. Mr. Speaker, every Indigenous woman working at the NWT mine has overcome challenges to be there. So when an Indigenous woman achieves success and is recognized with an award from the mining sector, we can all celebrate.

Today I want to recognize Ms. Grace Mackenzie. Grace is a mine liaison with the Tlicho government, and she was given the 2023 Award for Women in Mining NWT. Grace began her career in mining in 1998 in human resources with Diavik Diamond Mine and then Ekati Mine. She later joined De Beers Gahcho Kue Mine as a community liaison before moving into her current position with the Tlicho government. Grace is acknowledged as having a big impact on raising cultural awareness within the mining sector. She holds a warm and honest approach that encourage positive relationships between the government and Indigenous communities. She was recognized for her role with De Beers' Books in Homes program where she visited schools for more than a decade. She is passionate about her culture and people, has decades of experience in mining, and holds a commitment to cultural respect and equity. Grace is a role model to women and youth in the Tlicho and across the NWT. Grace has shown that you can work in the mining sector, have a rewarding successful career, and promote your culture.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Grace Mackenzie on her years of work promoting positive relationship in the mining sector and promoting Tlicho culture. She is a positive role model to our communities, and I hope to see more women achieve success in mining as Grace has done. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi.

Member from Monfwi, Grace Mackenzie is upstairs. And thank you very much and congratulations on your award.

Members' statements. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 168-20(1):  
60<sup>TH</sup> WEDDING ANNIVERSARY OF HENRY  
AND ALINA MCKAY

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take a moment today to congratulate two of my constituents, Alina and Henry McKay of Fort Resolution, for celebrating 60 years of marriage. Their lives first crossed path on the ice rink in Peter Pond School in 1961 where Alina skated as often as she could. On that day, on April 9th to be exact, Henry happened by and the two met for the first time. She fondly remembered how his skates were too big. From that point on, their both bonds grew, and they were married three years later. At first, they spent years on the land trapping before working at Pine Point. Alina got her GED after moving back to Fort Resolution. And after her children grew up, she worked as a cook in many different capacities in town and most recently opened her own takeout business with Henry. Henry retired in 2009. Henry, meanwhile, was a firefighter and worked at the sawmill until it burnt down. Now, after many struggles and hard times, they have six children together though the oldest, Henry Junior, is sadly deceased. They are also gifted with 19 grandchildren, though two have passed away, and 12 grandchildren.

I join my colleagues in wishing this entire -- the entire best and know that Henry still has yet to own a pair of skates that fits. Throughout their lives, they remained active hunters and trappers. They have won Senior Trappers awards, both together and separately, multiple times. Together, they won the Active Elders award in 2019, and Henry also received, later on the award from Deninu Kue First Nation recognition of his contribution and dedication and preservation of a betterment of the Treaty 8 community for the Akaitcho territory government.

Here's to their loving marriage and if anyone has a spare size -- spare skates, size 10, please let me know and I'll get it to him. Mr. Speaker, I just want to wish Henry and Alina a Happy 60th Anniversary. Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. My best to them, 60th Anniversary.

Members' statements. Member from Slave Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 169-20(1):  
WATERFRONT ACCESS IN YELLOWKNIFE

**MS. REID:** Sorry, the sun is shining, Mr. Speaker; I'm not sorry for that, though. Thank you.

Today I'm pleased to read my Youth Parliamentarian for 2024, Ms. Noa Jackson Grau's Member's statement.

I rise today to make a Member's statement on the lack -- issue of lack of water access in the Great Slave riding area and, generally, in the City of Yellowknife. There are not enough safe public access areas in and around the waterfront of our city, a city that is on the shore of one of our most beautiful, natural, and pristine lakes in the country. It is sad the beauty has always been concealed by private development and underdeveloped public access areas. In my riding, there are many waterfronts that are difficult to access for boaters, citizens, seniors, swimmers, and for anyone in general who would like to use these areas. Think about it. We could have things like food and drink vendors, live music, and Aurora viewing on the waterfront. There are so many cities like this in Canada that we can learn from. Capital cities and municipalities that have access to waterfronts make it a priority to showcase these areas. Why doesn't this capital city do the same? Although it would cost money to implement these improvements, these improvements could attract more tourism to these areas and generate revenue for our city. Some activities that could be implemented are water trampolines, boardwalks, docks for mooring boats, waterfront cafes, and several additional recreational activities that could be enhanced by having safer public access to the water. I'm calling on the Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment to consider working with me to make this happen for the improvement of territorial waterfronts. Let's make a splash. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Members' statements. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 170-20(1):  
LONG-TERM CARE IN INUVIK

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories' long-term care review program was completed way back in 2015, and it identified the overall need for long-term care in the

Northwest Territories at 115 beds per thousand people aged 70 years and older.

The Inuvik area services 3,200 people, Mr. Speaker, of which 11.6 percent are over the age of 70. This equates to a need for 43 beds. As such, the GNWT determined that a 48-bed facility would address the short and long-term needs of the Inuvik area.

Mr. Speaker, in 2018 the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation and the Gwich'in Tribal Council jointly developed and submitted an operational plan based on the best practices of long-term residential care. It was created in alignment with key GNWT documents, including the integrated service delivery model, continuing care framework and action plan Our Elders Our Community, Northwest Territories long-term care program review, Northwest Territories continuing care standards, and other relevant documents.

Mr. Speaker, the government has filed a proposal to establish a board of directors for the facility that is comprised of representatives appointed by the Gwich'in Tribal Council, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, and Government of the Northwest Territories, including community members to reflect the region's population and expected clients. Mr. Speaker, while community representation is paramount, the exact governance structure would depend on the ownership model chosen for the facility and the operations.

Three basic alternatives were proposed. Alternative 1 would be GNWT-owned and the Indigenous government operates. This alternative would see GNWT go to tender, design, and build or design/build a facility and would continue to own/maintain a facility but enter into a long-term operations contract with the Indigenous governments providing the ongoing health care.

Alternative 2, Mr. Speaker, would be that the Indigenous governments would own, and the GNWT would operate. This alternative would see the Indigenous governments design, build, own, maintain the facility through a sole source negotiated contract, and then lease the facility to GNWT for long-term care operations. The Indigenous governments will work to supplement reasonable shortfalls in federal and territorial capital health funding through a combination of equity and commercial financing and would partner with an industry leading design build contractor to construct the facility and use its internal resources to maintain the facility.

Mr. Speaker, alternative number 3 -- Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to continue my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Colleagues, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, alternative 3 would be the Indigenous governments would own and operate. This alternative would see the Indigenous governments design, build, own, maintain the facilities through a sole source negotiated contract and enter into a long-term operations contract with the government to provide the ongoing health care. The Indigenous governments would, again, work to support reasonable shortfalls of federal and territorial capital health funding through a combination of equity and commercial financing.

Mr. Speaker, this is a much-needed facility in Inuvik, and I look forward to hearing what health and social services plans to do to make this a reality. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Members' statements. Member from Range Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 171-20(1):  
YOUTH PARLIAMENT 2024

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge this year's wonderful session of Youth Parliament, which you presided over, and I thank you for that, Mr. Speaker. And I also want to recognize my young counterpart, JC Mareoneau of St. Patrick's High School for his excellent work as Range Lake's MLA. I know his words continue to resonate with me as we resume our session here in the Legislative Assembly.

JC spoke passionately to his principles of dignity and respect for all when he addressed the Youth Assembly on the topic of homelessness and poverty, speaking of how his family only recently immigrated from the Philippines. It was powerful to hear him contrast his idea of Canada with the reality he encountered when he arrived. Why is one of the wealthiest countries in the world still having so many issues struggling to feed -- struggling to support people feeding their families and putting a roof on their heads? When JC highlighted the work his school does to give back to the community, particularly through the interact club, he proved that young people are engaged in their communities and make a real difference, which is why we need to continue to support youth volunteerism, school clubs, and other after school programs so that young Northerners have the opportunity to learn early

on how rewarding it is to support their friends and neighbours.

What starts with volunteering and organizing at a young age can set the next generation on their way into the Legislative Assembly and beyond, Mr. Speaker. We rely on raising a new generation of leaders like JC to provide us with fresh perspectives and often harsh truths knowing one day they will take our place. I am proud JC has already proven he can really shake things up in this Assembly, just like his MLA. He is surely well on his way to changing our future for the better. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. I can honestly vouch he was very much like you.

Members' statements. And it was a compliment. Members' statements. Member from Frame Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 172-20(1):  
CHILD AND YOUTH COUNSELLING

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2018, the departments of ECE and health collaborated to deliver the child and youth counselling initiative which brought counsellors into NWT schools to better connect children and youth to mental health support. In 2023, a contractor was hired to review the initiative and found that when it came to delivering services for youth, the program was largely a success. The contractor noted that having CYC services available in the schools has not only improved access but has also increased the identification of mental health disorders that previously would have gone unnoticed and untreated in children and youth. Notably, the few problems identified with the program were primarily issues associated with interdepartmental collaboration and understanding.

The report's top two recommendations were that health and ECE's working relationship be better defined and strengthened and that the CYC initiative continue to be delivered in schools. Perplexingly, the government responded that they agreed with the recommendation to continue the initiative but then proceeded to completely dismantle it, reducing the number of counsellors, removing them from the schools, and then replacing the initiative with a fundamentally different program.

The changes have been communicated as an improvement to the program, but it's very difficult to see them as positive or remotely aligned with the report's recommendations when they are resulting in counsellors being

pulled from schools and mental health services being reduced.

In response to concerns raised by one of my constituents about these changes, the health Minister reassured that counselling would still be available through the community counselling program but also noted that the changes have reduced access to the program and children may be put on waiting lists who were previously receiving service.

Something isn't adding up here, Mr. Speaker. We had a program which was meeting kids where they are and succeeding in helping them, and it appears the program has been dismantled because our departments were struggling to work together effectively and felt it would be easier to change the program to avoid this problem rather than work to address it. Problems like this are why I advocated in my priority speech that we need to make government-wide changes to shift to more collaborative models of working, and I am tentatively pleased to see the government strongly emphasize the importance of interdepartmental collaboration in their freshly-tabled mandate. My hope is this shift will result in staff being given the tools to constructively manage conflict so situations like what's happened with the CYC program don't continue to occur. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Members' statements. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 173-20(1):  
SENIORS' HOME HEATING SUBSIDY

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In our communities, we recognize our elders as our most prized resources. They guide us and give us strength to do the best we can in helping others to live a productive life. In return, we make sure that they are looked after and cared for during their golden years. But this government is taking a totally different approach. This government is looking out for the young and able, while the elders are left to fend for themselves with the limited assistance that they receive for home heating fuel while being on a fixed income. In total, we have 52 recipients who take advantage of this program within the Mackenzie Delta region. That is not very much to accommodate.

Mr. Speaker, not too long ago, the elders were struggling to survive on \$1,000 per month for heating fuel. Then this government decided that this was too much, so they cut the seniors fuel subsidy to \$750 per month. In Aklavik, the price of heating fuel is \$2.68 per litre. The seniors on fuel subsidy are given a modest discount of 5

cents per litre. With a price set at \$2.63, most, if not all the seniors, have to pay up to \$2,000 out of their fixed income just to make sure that they have fuel to make it to the next month.

Mr. Speaker, let's put this into perspective. Given the amount allocated to the seniors for heating fuel to keep their homes from freezing up in the colder months of the year, the amount of fuel is less than two 45-gallon barrels of fuel for the whole month. Again, the elders have to ensure that they have enough fuel for the entire month. They have to pay out of their own pockets. To me, there is something wrong with this picture.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for this government to step up and start looking after the elders of the Northwest Territories. This government has to do the honourable thing and recalculate how they allocate the seniors fuel subsidy program based on the steadily increase in price of heating fuel. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, colleagues. Increasing price of heating fuel, high cost of living, and the harsh environment that we live in.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, our greatest resources that we have is our elders. It is time that we as government start to look out for the elders more seriously and make sure that they are living in a secure home. The elders truly deserve to live in a comfortable life because they are the ones who paved the road that we walk on today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Mackenzie Delta. Members' statements. Member from the Sahtu.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 174-20(1):  
ALL-SEASON ROAD

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Part 2: Sahtu climate change and unprecedented low water levels at Mackenzie River.

Mr. Speaker, the historic water levels in the Mackenzie River basin has raised endless stressful concerns. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this moment to once again address the all-season road connection Wrigley to Norman Wells, a project in regulatory process.

This vital infrastructure project is crucial in addressing the current resupply crisis. I welcome the discount air barge submitted by Buffalo Airways. What about larger project materials? Yes, Mr. Speaker, the Sahtu will benefit from this year-round access, lower the

northern market basket measurement, and this infrastructure will also become a provider to the NWT and national GDP. The all-season road cannot be overstated. It will provide improved access to health care, education, open the doors to economic opportunities for government, industry, commercial, and residents.

Mr. Speaker, critical to this project's fruition is capital security and funding. Without adequate financial resources, even the most thought-out planned projects can quickly fall apart. Mr. Speaker, it is essential that we secure the necessary capital and recognize the in-place permits to this all-season road project. And, Mr. Speaker, we are also on the crossroads to this mandate by this and previous Assemblies.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I highlight the funding model within our capacity, 26 percent in project equity, capital commitments, amendments to the existing funds for expense, June 2018 funding announcement, and the existing bilateral agreement capital we possess. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Members' statements. Member from the Deh Cho.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 175-20(1):  
LACK OF CELL PHONE SERVICE ON  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HIGHWAYS

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I want to speak about the lack of cell service across the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard from numerous Deh Cho constituents who have voiced their concerns about the lack of cell service when travelling on the NWT highway system. People have safety concerns regarding the inability to call for help if something were to happen while travelling on our highways, especially women travelling alone with their children. Mr. Speaker, some people have told me that this is an issue that affects them so much that they fear driving alone, especially to do business in other communities or even visit family. This issue affects all residents and businesses as well, and it must be improved as well.

Mr. Speaker, this is an NWT-wide problem that all highways have, and all regions are dealing with. All ten highways across the NWT have this problem, and this problem is especially dangerous for people in the event of natural disasters and emergencies, such as wildfires as we've seen throughout last summer, when telecommunications went down in multiple regions.

Mr. Speaker, I know that many MLAs in many Assemblies have spoken about this issue, and since improving public safety is part of the mandate of the 20th Assembly I believe improving cell service across our highway system should be part of our government's plan. I will have questions for the Premier later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Deh Cho. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife North.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 176-20(1):  
TERRITORY'S CHALLENGES WITH  
LITERACY AND NUMERACY

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, continuing on from my statement yesterday, I want to speak about our territory's challenges with basic literacy and numeracy, what is at stake, and how this Assembly might help.

In 2012, the Supreme Court of Canada released a unanimous decision recognizing that literacy -- sorry, recognizing that learning to read is not a privilege but a basic and essential human right. The case involved a British Columbia student with dyslexia. The Court ruled that he had a right to receive the intensive supports and interventions he needed to learn how to read.

Within the last five years, the Ontario Human Rights Commission conducted a public inquiry into the right to read. Ontario's public inquiry found that we have decades of extensive research on the most effective methods for teaching students early reading skills, and yet Ontario is still failing to consistently use those proven methods, like phonics. I am worried that the NWT is similarly failing.

Ontario's inquiry found that students who don't develop good early reading skills will go on to struggle in nearly every aspect of school. They start to believe that they're stupid, even though reading disabilities have nothing to do with intelligence. They're more likely to develop low self-esteem, mental health problems like depression and anxiety, likely to act out through bullying and sometimes self-harm or even attempt suicide. Over the long-term, it's easy to see how this can lead to unemployment, substance use issues, homelessness, and higher involvement in crime and incarceration.

There are a significant number of children in our school system who have not yet learned to speak, others who do not know enough words to even begin to learn to read. So consider the consequences of that. If there are concerns about abuse or mistreatment, these children

are unable to explain what happened to them because they don't have the words. This inability to communicate puts them at extreme risk. That is when the assistance of a speech language pathologist in each school is crucial, and yet only some of our students have access to these kinds of professionals. Mr. Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So there is evidence that many learning disabilities can actually be prevented with the right early interventions and support, so a learning disability does not need to become a lifelong disability. According to the Human Rights Commission of Ontario, we should not be using student accommodations as a substitute for teaching them how to read. We cannot give up on the expectation that every child can and will become literate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 177-20(1):  
E-SCOOTERS

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's time to have that unfortunate and uncomfortable conversation about E-scooters. It is time to ask the government to start looking into regulations.

Now, if Dr. Suess was here today, he might say about E-scooters something along the lines of, I see them zip. I see them zag. On the sidewalks, on the roads, everywhere, who knows. Between cars, between people, eek. The next time I see them laying flat under a steeple. No brake lights for me as they glide through the intersection. Fools only stop. Helmets, signals, intersection stops. Nary a one as they flip their top. Mr. Speaker, it's time to say stop, stop, stop.

Mr. Speaker, some will argue scooters -- E-scooters are a toy. And, you know, to an MLA like me, they may say hey, take it easy, relax. You know, fair enough. However, Mr. Speaker, when you're driving over 30 kilometers an hour on a sidewalk, it's no longer a Nerf gun, Mr. Speaker. On average, E-scooters range between 15 and 30 miles an hour. That's 24 to 48 kilometers an hour. Similarly, do you know another toy that goes that fast through intersections with people? What about we regulate drones? So it's not unheard of to find ways that the public can still enjoy their novelties safely.



Mr. Speaker, looking through the Motor Vehicle Act, there's more regulations on pedestrians than there are on E-scooters. Pedestrians are told they must look both ways as they cross the intersection. But, again, it's silent on scooters. So we, unfortunately, do that.

Mr. Speaker, what about bicycles, for example? It even says bicycles, under section 26(1)(a), shall not ride on a sidewalk, Mr. Speaker.

So my point being is then we have these motorized vehicles, public safety at risk, and it's time to have this uncomfortable conversation. Cities like Toronto have banned them. Mr. Speaker, the Ontario government has done an opt in process by saying all scooters are banned unless you come up with regulations in your own way. And they're running a test period. Mr. Speaker, my point is it's time to address this through public safety because the last thing we want to do is be looking backwards to say what could we have done or what should we have done for safety. And it doesn't apply perfectly across the continuum of municipalities, and we'll discuss that during question period. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Yellowknife Centre. Members' statements. Member from Hay River South.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 178-20(1):  
COMMENDING FLOYD POWDER'S  
DEDICATION TO LAST POST FUND

**HON. VINCE McKAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take a moment to recognize one of our esteemed colleagues. During my previous engagements, I've been involved -- actively involved with the local Hay River Legion in Hay River, and I was on the executive. I was able to do lots of work with this individual in regards to his commitments.

The one I speak of is none other than our sergeant-at-arms of the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Floyd Powder. Today I stand in the House to commend Mr. Powder for his outstanding contribution to our nation's veterans, a commitment that has gained federal recognition with the Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation. This award celebrates his exemplary service, particularly his dedication to the Last Post Fund. Under Mr. Powder's stewardship, the Last Post Fund has made significant strides as evidenced by the federal government's acknowledgement for his efforts in identifying 27 unmarked graves, many of which have belonged to Indigenous veterans. His unwavering commitment is further underscored by his initiative to provide proper recognition having placed headstones on

graves in Hay River and other communities in the Northwest Territories.

Considering these remarkable achievements, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Mr. Floyd Powder. His tireless efforts and selfless service exemplifies the highest models of public duty. We are truly fortunate to have such a dedicated individual amongst us. Thank you, Floyd, for your invaluable contributions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Hay River South. Members' statements.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 179-20(1):  
LEO EHRLICH – YOUTH PARLIAMENT 2024

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Colleagues, yesterday I talked about our Youth Parliament and the great job the youth did. In keeping in the theme with some of my colleagues today, I did ask the youth person if I could do their statement in the House. Leo Ehrlich represented the Nahendeh region. Here is his statement:

Kids tend not to like school. The reason we look forward to breaks, the weekend and such, is because we don't want to spend all day, every day, in a dark room memorizing complex formulas and grammatical rules that, unless speaking to an English teacher, will most likely never get used in day-to-day life. Now, I'm not saying that we should abolish the current school system or anything, but I believe that there need to be some changes. Major changes. The most important and easiest thing we can change is escape that dark classroom and take learning outside. Taking learning outside will make students more engaged, improve mental health and well-being, and teach new and valuable lessons. There are countless studies that show that the students tend to be in better more receptive moods outside, are more open to learning, and have boosted creativity, problem solving, and critical thinking. There are tons of things to learn from being outside and not just things like building forts, berry-picking, or climbing. Things like patience and learning to truly appreciate the beauty of life all come best from being outside on top of whatever lessons might have been planned. Many students aren't engaged enough in school, zoning out mid-class, getting in the way of learning. Being outside could make learning way more engaging for most students because children like being outside, too. There're tons of physical benefits as well as, as previously mentioned, mental and emotional ones. We aren't talking about dragging kids outside when it's freezing cold, or pouring rain, but in the spring, summer and fall when it's nice. I believe that it is pivotal for the

new generations to take care of the environment, and you can't care about something if you don't know about it. With the wildfires, permafrost thawing, and floods, climate change is playing a bigger part than ever in our lives but, eventually, those currently in power will be too old to fight it. That responsibility falls to the next generation, and we need them to care. The best way to get somebody to care about something is by knowing that thing. And right now, not enough kids care about the land that we live on because they don't spend enough time on the land to truly care about it. And schools without question sometimes to blame.

Being respectful of the time, I would like the rest of the statement be deemed as read.

In closing, I would like to thank Leo for being the Nahendeh representative, willing to share his speech with us today and, more importantly, I would like to wish him and his team all the best at the national debate championship in Vancouver where he is right now. Thank you.

Indigenous peoples have traditionally spent a lot of time outside. The government has been trying to blend Indigenous and new world cultures for a while, yet the school system has stayed for the most part the same as anywhere else. Only 56 percent of kids in the NWT graduate high school, and many of them drop out because they aren't engaged in their work. Taking school outside would probably boost initiative and make the kids more interested in school, because it's not the miserable slog that we know it as today.

There are countless jobs out there, and they don't all happen in cramped, stagnant offices. This is even more so the case in the NWT. The current learning style isn't doing anything to help with any of these jobs and is if anything getting in the way of people approaching any jobs that take place outside by not preparing kids for them. Changing the environment of the classroom to a more fluid one would better prepare kids for jobs that are needed in the NWT, encouraging them to stay. In short, I believe that the economy, well-being of students and land would all benefit greatly from taking classes outside, traditions would be better preserved, dropout rates would lessen, and kids and the adults they would grow up to be would all be better off.

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Members' statements. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery.

### Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

**MR. SPEAKER:** Colleagues, I'd like to recognize Chief Melanie Norwegian Menacho from Jean Marie and her better half -- I mean, her husband Fred Menacho. Welcome to the Chamber.

Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize two pages from Great Slave riding, Oscar Mifflin, who is here with us today, and Oliver Barrieau, who paged for us yesterday. Both are students at Ecole Allain St-Cyr, and I'm proud to have them here to watch the proceedings. I was also pleased to meet and speak with their parents prior to this sitting, and I know they're very proud of you both.

I would also like to welcome to the Chamber union members from health care and corrections, many of whom who have had to leave to go back to work. Also, Sarah Jane Dempster, president of the NTFI; Chris Parsons, director of membership services for the UNW, and Adrienne Cartwright, communications officer for the UNW. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Hay River North.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Mr. Speaker, every year the grade 6 class from Princess Alexandra School in Hay River travels to Yellowknife, and

they visit the ledge. For the last four years they weren't able to do that, but this year, Mr. Speaker, they came back. And so I want to recognize Ms. Hoss' grade 6 class from Princess Alexandra who joined us today. We have Maliki Beaulieu, Skylar Cayen, Katanna McArthur, Noel Peters, Jager Walsh, Blakely Beck, Abigail Belanger, Kennedy Bolt, Shelby Cofwell, Shane Delorey, Nash Fraser, Olivia Frais, Sawyer Hurst, Charlotte Hinesruggles, Michele Longwey, AnnaLee Bunkin, Braden Morrissey, and there's more names that my colleague from Hay River South will be reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Hay River North. Member from Hay River South.

**HON. VINCE McKAY:** I'll add to that list. Linda Dungar, Kevin Webb, Natalie Boucher, Chloe Campbell, Artise Cardinal, Brendan Flett, Zachariah Snellgrove. Chaperones Stephanie Hoss, Therese Bouchard, Alayah Femelcan, Kyler Krunke, Brian Hannah, Clayton Jamieson, and Jennifer Webb.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize one of my constituents, Mr. David Wasylciw. He is also a YK1 district -- education district board chair and one of the key figures behind Open NWT, which has done a lot to expand awareness of our proceedings here today and our institution.

I'd also like to recognize Maddie Hodson who is one of the pages with us today. Thank you for helping with our proceedings.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize as well the Chief Melanie Norwegian from Jean Marie River and Fred Menacho. Mahsi. Welcome.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to recognize Chief Melanie Norwegian Menacho and her husband Fred Menacho of JMR. Welcome.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Thebacha.

**HON. JAY MACDONALD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize Austin Blanchard and Kelly Modeste, correction officers that were here for the budget speech from Fort Smith. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize Mr. Tony Brushett who is the executive director of the Salvation Army here in Yellowknife.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. If we missed anyone, we thank you very much to be here, and welcome to your House. It's great to have an audience.

Replies to the budget address. Member from Range Lake.

### Replies to the Budget Address

#### MR. TESTART'S REPLY

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have neither a podium nor new shoes, but I will do my best.

Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to stand today to reply to the Budget Address, if not for its content but for the fact that we are at last able to make real decisions that will affect the aspirations and needs of the people we represent. It has been 192 days since we were all elected to serve our constituents in this Chamber, and since then the pace of our new government has been measured and cautious. We have, as a caucus, opted to take our time to stay in our comfort zone and take decisions slowly as we move to more consequential choices that will define the actions of the 20th Assembly and ultimately deliver on results to Northerners in all of our communities.

While I appreciate that we must continue to move together as one to realize the dream of true consensus government, it is a bit too slow for what the Northwest Territories needs right now. Northerners know we have difficult years ahead and equally difficult decisions that must be made today if we are to preserve a future for our land and our peoples, but slow and steady we have been.

First, with an interim budget that promised little more than to keep the lights on while we went on to plan bigger and better things, our priorities, four collaborative themes that serve as the axis for which the 20th Assembly -- for the 20th Assembly and guide our decision-making.

- Suitability, accessibility, and affordability of housing;
- A strong economic foundation;
- Access to health care and addressing the effects of trauma; and,

- Safe residents and communities.

These political priorities are something we all agree to in this House, and I am confident that Northerners agree to these as well, as the correct choice to chart for our government. But these priorities are not precise actions for our government to take. Rather, they represent the ideal outcomes of the work we set out to accomplish for the next three years. The precise measurable actions that will be taken are in the mandate - a document produced by the Premier and Cabinet. At least it was supposed to be.

Instead, the mandate further refines the priorities by adding additional aspirational goals as bulleted lists nested under each priority. Oh, and, Mr. Speaker, the mandate also splits the third priority in half into access to health care and addressing the effects of trauma. So now we're up to five priorities. Mr. Speaker, we're getting closer to some real commitments. But you won't find them in the mandate. No, instead, you have to look at the four-year business plans, documents that will be tabled later today. These have been created by the departments to meet the priorities in the mandate, priorities based on the priorities of the Assembly. The business plans are significantly better than the mandate as they offer clear and tangible outcomes that the government intends to put in place through its efforts over the life of the 20th Assembly. The public and Regular Members can use these to measure the effectiveness of Cabinet and hold us all to account for the promises we have made. But there's still something missing, Mr. Speaker.

These plans lack cohesion towards a shared vision for the territory. They are the best efforts produced by a single ministry in a vast government enterprise of thousands of workers. I'm told behind closed doors I will have to wait for mandate letters to be issued before I truly get to see the full picture of how this government will eventually work together. But I am tired of waiting. It seems that there is also another -- there's always another process around the corner, another step that must be taken before we can get to governing this territory.

I want to empower our Cabinet to lead, but there's too much hesitancy to seize the initiative especially when the answer is always another process, another procedure, another plan. It feels as if we're in a cycle of perpetual planning instead of taking any kind of action.

Mr. Speaker, the Chamber of Mines in Nunavut have been loud in sounding the alarm bell for the future of our economy with their Eyes Wide Open report. The key message of this report is,

quote, "at the most basic level, there appears to be no clear unified vision for the territory. The consequence is a lack of urgency that might have otherwise resulted in investments to revitalize the resource sector or that gave way to a thorough exploration into whatever is to be the alternative."

This report has shocking predictions that include the NWT losing more than a thousand residents as a direct result of the diminished resource sector with Yellowknife experiencing as much as 70 percent of those losses. This, of course, means the GNWT stands to lose over \$100 million in revenue in a scenario where the resource sector disappears further exacerbating our strained financial resources. This commentary is important for us to consider because it's critical of something I raised earlier - the lack of a cohesive vision from the government as a whole.

This budget suffers from the same problem of divided government as the business plans. Each department followed their marching orders from the Financial Management Board to deliver cuts to meet the fiscal strategy while realigning spending towards the mandate priorities in isolation of one another. Well, what we have here today is a financial Frankenstein's monster, collated interdepartmental budgets brought together by the Minister of Finance, with a first to tell you that she does not make the budget but plays little more than a coordinating role. If we need proof of a lack of vision and cohesive agenda, look no further than the \$10 million spending cap on forced growth and new initiatives that this government committed to in its fiscal strategy. This budget proposes to exceed it by \$39.7 million. The good news is this is not an austerity budget. The bad news is it's not an anything budget. It does not propose anything transformative, nor does it promise deep cuts and job losses. It fails to reduce spending in a significant way that will restore balance as per the fiscal strategy, and it fails to significantly invest in this Assembly's priorities and, importantly, our communities.

The municipal funding gap remains unresolved with local governments underfunded to the tune of \$52 million. The small community employment support program and capital access program are both being gutted to save the GNWT \$2.5 million at the expense of much needed investment in small Indigenous communities across the NWT. But perhaps most alarming are the proposed cuts to Housing NWT. The department is reducing its budget by 10 percent or nearly \$13 million. Some of these reductions are sunseting federal dollars. Others are driven by FMB mandated reductions, including \$583,000 cut

from the rental affordability assistance funding. In practical terms, though there will be 226 units that NWT Housing plans to build in the 20th Assembly, none of them are new. They are existing commitments that represent no net increase to housing stock in the NWT. Using this example, we see a department whose core mandate is essential to realize the top priority of the 20th Assembly prevented from doing so because cuts were mandated by process, and everybody had to chip in.

The thinking behind this budget did not start from a place of how do we deliver on housing priorities and make necessary cuts to achieve that. And therein lies the problem. We need leadership from the centre, and that means consensus-based decision-making needs to change.

I want to be clear that I do not -- I do believe we have Ministers who get it and want to break down silos and get results to make an impact. What we lack is the courage to break free of the systems within our institutions that prevent that from happening. If this Assembly is to succeed, this Cabinet needs to embrace a radical departure from the status quo if we are to see different results. I will acknowledge that the Premier alluded to this in his speech yesterday when presenting the mandate, and the finance Minister today spoke about being creative, imaginative, and taking more risks.

Mr. Speaker, talk is cheap, and Northerners are expecting action. This budget does not deliver on change. It doesn't even try.

Mr. Speaker, most important to me and many Northerners -- and I think all Northerners -- is our health care system. Of all responsibilities of this government and all governments in Canada, this is the most important because it is struggling not only in the services it provides to our residents but as a matter of financial sustainability. The Auditor General has taken the uncommon approach to draw the attention of the public to ongoing questions of health care spending because, quite frankly, it is destabilizing the very system of our government's financial resources. This budget proposes health and social services spending of \$644 million, a 6 percent increase from last year. This is not a case of underinvestment. It is a case of good value for money and ensuring these dollars are improving patient outcomes and recruiting and retaining new clinicians, doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals. Our results on both fronts have been poor for many years, and spending more is not resulting in better care. We must get health care spending under control and make it both efficient and effective. And just as well

because we need to get health care management under control.

Health care professionals I've spoken to have warned me that they have true belief that the present state of a health care system and the day-to-day functioning at Stanton Hospital are placing the public at risk, and they fear that something serious and irreversible will happen soon. There is a staffing crisis at the hospital and throughout the health care system. Nurses on the frontline often work short. It is even alleged that they are required to take unsafe patient assignments that are against internal policies and against Canadian standards of practice. Given the grave situation on the frontline, it should come as no surprise that the health authorities have made great use of private health agencies. Last year alone, NTHSSA spent \$4.4 million on private health agency nurses, the equivalent of 31 registered nurse positions. A long-term reliance on agency nurses will cripple the budget and overall health care system. If agency nurses are going to be used in a great number, I foresee a huge exodus of local nurses and locum nurses. This will reduce services available to Northerners and raise costs ever higher for the provision of basic health care in our communities.

Finding a solution will require significant investment and time. We could create an environment that would attract health care talent and be one of the premiere employment facilities nationally, just like it used to be only ten years ago. But if we make this a priority and bring the management of health care dollars under closer scrutiny, we must phase out the use of private agency nurses by the end of 2026 as many other jurisdictions in Canada are currently doing.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to point out where I think this budget gets it right. And perhaps my opinion is solely colored by the priorities of my Range Lake riding but, nonetheless, they are new and promising initiatives being proposed.

I commend the Premier for making public safety and community policing a top priority of his ministry of Justice. There is a welcomed and much needed investment of \$1.8 million on crime reduction resources, including nine new RCMP members and a dedicated organized crime unit in G-division. Likewise, the Department of Justice promises an ambitious and novel legislative agenda with the Trespass Act, Civil Forfeiture Act, and Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act as clear examples of tools that will assist in enhancing community policing in Yellowknife and all our communities.

The Department of Infrastructure has a good handle on its many capital projects with clear and often costed timelines indicated in its business plan. There is planning in place for the electrification of highways, implementation of electric vehicles, or EVs, and the expansion of the Taltson hydroelectric dam - necessary investments in clean energy that cannot come soon enough.

Likewise, Industry, Tourism and Investment has the Sisyphean ordeal of reviving a flagging economy. The much delayed and deflated Mineral Resources Act implementation remains a concern, but I am confident that the Minister's well aware of what needs to be done and is bringing forward spending to get it done in this budget. I wish there was more support for the minerals industry, particularly an increase to the mining incentive policy, funding that results in five times the amount of funding invested in local NWT communities. There is low hanging fruit in many of the programs that are successes that we should be investing in a time of economic contraction.

Mr. Speaker, as it stands, this is not a budget that I can support without significant change. While I acknowledge it's not my place to make the budget, it is my place to recommend changes that support the needs of Range Lake, Yellowknife, and for all Northerners. I simply do not believe there's enough imagination and ambition to move the government forward towards growth and change in the years ahead. We must get this right from the start. We cannot afford to start on the wrong foot and risk the progress that Northerners expect from us and elected us to deliver on their behalf. I made a promise not to let them down, and it is promise I intend to keep. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Replies to the Budget Address, Day 1 of 7. Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member from Great Slave.

### Oral Questions

QUESTION 165-20(1):  
WATERFRONT ACCESS IN YELLOWKNIFE

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the ITI Minister tell me what work is currently planned in the City of Yellowknife to increase access to our waterfronts? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Great Slave. ITI.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, first I want to start off by saying let's make a splash has to be one of my

favorite sentences so far this year in this House. So thank you to the Member for reading her Youth Parliamentarian Member's statement.

So currently in the City of Yellowknife, Mr. Speaker, the ITI is working collaboratively with ECE on the Robertson Drive Dock. The project is currently in the design and planning phase, and the design and planning phase will take place in 2024 with the construction expecting to commence in the summer of 2025. The total budget for this project is \$3 million. And any future harbour development will be pursued in close collaboration, of course, with Yellowknives Dene First Nation along with the City of Yellowknife being involved in community engagement as well.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, as our waterways are federally regulated, there's also the Department of Fisheries and Oceans small craft harbours unit, who I know is doing their own feasibility study regarding potential development of a small craft harbour dock as well. Thank you.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for that. Recognizing, of course, that our water levels are quite low this year, hoping, crossing all fingers and appendages that it goes back up, can the Minister speak to any desire that her department has to work with the City of Yellowknife and YKDFN to increase further recreational opportunities along the shores of our beautiful lake? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for the question. We definitely see the importance of having places for Northerners to go and recreate and the direct linkages of that to mental health and being out on the land.

Yellowknife has access to Fred Henne Park. That is maintained by ITI. There's also a host of parks and wayside parks, campgrounds, along the Ingraham Trail that all Northerners also have access to. I think it's important that, you know, ITI -- or to state -- sorry, that ITI provides funding programs for the City of Yellowknife to expand its current visitor services that are described in the MOU that the City of Yellowknife currently holds with the Yellowknives Dene First Nation through their joint economic development strategy. And ITI also has a host of funding mechanisms where, because a lot of our waterfront properties are either privately owned or are in withdrawal, what we do is we fund different business ventures to hopefully encourage some spinoffs for residents to be able to do business on the water, do business along the shores. And I look

forward to supporting more opportunities like that for Northerners. Thank you.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that. However, you know, some of the places that she spoke of, while are a favorite of many Yellowknifers - Fred Henne, Ingraham Trail - we have many residents in Great Slave who do not have access to vehicles, who do not have access to, you know, possibly getting out to those locales on a tiny budget that they might have. So can the Minister speak -- or commit to speak to the City of Yellowknife to look at properties that they might hold and some developments that might be possible in the future for entrepreneurs working in conjunction collaboratively or stronger together, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, I'm always game to work with any partners. ITI currently also supports the city's tourism strategy, the Yellowknife visitors centre, and the Yellowknife Wayfinding signage, for existing recreational opportunities. I think this is also a great time to let people know about the City of Yellowknife's new buses. And also the City of Yellowknife has an access for all program. So if somebody can't afford -- is a low income family, can't afford buses, there is an access for all pass that gives people access to buses and also facilities in Yellowknife. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of ITI. Final supplementary. Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** I'm good. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Oral questions. Member from Frame Lake.

QUESTION 166-20(1):  
CHILD AND YOUTH COUNSELLING  
SERVICES

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I spoke earlier about the CYC program. This question is for the Minister of ECE or Health and Social Services.

Mr. Speaker, I have constituents who are being told their children no longer have access to counsellors in the schools. The departments have said that reductions will be replaced by prevention and early intervention. It's difficult for me to see how this will occur without counsellors present. So can the Ministers help me correct the dots. What does this mean? What does it mean to prevent an -- prevention and early intervention mean without counsellors in the schools? Thank you

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. I am going to take a guess, and I'm going to ask the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my answers on this one might be a little bit long, but I'm going to try and keep them short.

So there was a review done, and it was found that not all schools have the same amount of access. Because it was really hard to fill these positions across the territory. It was also found that some community schools were looking for something different than a clinician, a clinically trained master's degree counsellor. Some communities wanted to have Indigenous counsellors in their school. So a program was devised that allowed people to have a lot more autonomy in their classrooms and in their schools for the mental health needs that were required for students in that community and in that school system.

So what does it mean to have prevention? It means that we need to look at ways to reach more students than just the ones who are able to get in front of a clinician or with a counsellor, that our schools have a lot of mental health needs. Right now, there's a tremendous amount of depression and anxiety, and how can we go upstream and as a school body address the needs of our students more globally. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that answer. So it sounds like there was some problems specifically in some communities. But did these specific problems really necessitate a wholesale dismantling of a program that in many schools was working? I'm hearing from constituents that they're disappointed their children no longer have access to counsellors. So did we really need to dismantle the whole program or just solve one problem?

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think with this case here, it's important to let the Member know, and let all parents know, that students still have access to clinicians in schools. In addition, I've had multiple conversations about this with my colleague from Health and Social Services. If a student needs to access a counsellor in their school and doesn't have the ability to travel to primary care to access a counsellor, that they can actually speak to the school. The student can even do that to maintain privacy. And the counsellor can come into the school. It's not a matter of the student having to always leave the school.

In addition to that, if the school education body or the school itself wants to use their 55 percent of the funding in order to hire an additional clinical counsellor, they're able to use that funding to do that. They just need to make sure that they're also going upstream and providing those preventative care support services so that more students have access to mental health. Because I think it's about changing the stigma. It is about having very open conversations and everybody learning what it means to take care of ourselves as a whole human. Thank you.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that answer. That is encouraging and, in fact, more encouraging than what I've heard when I originally e-mailed the departments.

So I still have a constituent who has concerns about continuity of care. Their child appears to be losing access to a counsellor. How are the departments coordinating to ensure this continuity of care? It sounds like there may be counsellors in the schools. So how are the departments coordinating this and ensuring that they're engaging with parents who are concerned about this, their children losing access. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate this question because I think it's important for everybody to hear. If something goes to an MLA and comes to me and then from me, it goes to a deputy minister and down the chain and then makes its way to the school board and then to the school, I really encourage people to start by having these conversations with the school about what their child needs. If they're not getting a response from the school, all of our schools have education bodies with elected officials that are there to serve our residents as well. If an education body is not doing its job, I encourage people to come to me and let's see what we can do together. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary.

Oral questions. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

QUESTION 167-20(1):  
SENIORS' HOME HEATING SUBSIDY

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for Minister of ECE. We have a number of seniors who take advantage of the seniors' heating fuel program. Although they are grateful for the assistance from the department, it is brought to my attention that they are paying three times the amount that is

allocated to them over their fixed income just to make it through the month.

Will the Minister and her department look at recalculating the subsidy program so that it meets the needs of our seniors across the Northwest Territories? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the seniors' home heating subsidy is not intended to cover a hundred percent of someone's home heating costs. The goal of the program is to cover up to 80 percent of someone's home heating costs. That being said, if there are seniors that are spending 75 percent of their fixed income on home heating fuel, I would question if they're on the right program. In addition to the seniors' home heating subsidy, there's also income assistance. If people aren't on both at the same time, so I question if somebody should be in a different program and would encourage them to reach out to their client navigator. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the high cost of living and the ever-increasing cost of heating fuel, will the Minister and her department look at increasing the amount of fuel that is allocated to the seniors of the Northwest Territories, especially in the colder months? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's been routine reviews of this program over the years, and it's one that the department keeps a close eye on knowing how important it is to seniors across the territory. In addition, in the last two years there have been one time top-ups acknowledging the additional cost of fuel across the territory and how that has an impact to seniors. And so ECE's been able to -- by kind of taking dollars from other programs, put them into this program to be able to serve seniors as best as possible. That being said, Mr. Speaker, I will also continue to work to attempt to secure more permanent funds for the program, and the House has my commitment on that. Thank you.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for that commitment.

Can the Minister look at reviewing the policies and procedures related to the program in question and involve the recipients of this program to meet their needs and not that of the government? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, this program was reviewed



last year. It's one that the department continues to closely monitor. Because our goal is to ensure that seniors' home heating fuel is covered to, like I said, 80 percent. And so it's one that we keep a close eye on because we know that the cost of fuel fluctuates, and so we will continue to do that because we know it's an important program for seniors across the territory. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

QUESTION 168-20(1):  
LONG-TERM CARE NEEDS IN INUVIK

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll give the Minister of ECE a break. We'll go to the Minister of housing. In my statement, I did mention the long-term care facility that's been on the books in Inuvik for quite some time, since 2015, so around nine years. So I'd like to ask my colleague from Inuvik, and the Honourable Minister of Health and Social Services, what the current plan is for the long-term facility in Inuvik? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment -- Health and Social Services. Try and give you a promotion there today -- or demotion, whatever. Back to you, Health and Social Services. There we go.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep this one. And thank you to the Member. I think this project has been discussed in our community for, as he mentioned, way back from 2015. And I know in 2020, there was a reevaluation of long-term care beds needs, and one of the impact that happened was that we as a government wanted to put more investment into seniors aging in place with dignity. So that means supporting seniors in their homes as long as they can and not -- and moving away from these centralized areas where we would end up having to send them. So what the current plan is right now is we just -- I think the geotechnical analysis has just been complete. And so now they are, hopefully for the fall, they'll be going out to RFP for schematic design phase. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you, Minister. That is excellent news. It's a little overdue, but certainly I'm happy to hear that work is being done on it.

Given the impact in our community, and obviously the jobs that this would create as well, both long-term positions and short-term positions in the construction, has the

department considered working with the Indigenous governments as proposed or similar to as proposed in 2018? I know that's a few years ago, but are they looking at working with Indigenous governments on this project, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I know that the plan -- where the plan was before. And I know the Member was very involved in that plan. And I agree that the facility itself, you know, with what he's saying, with the RFP going out, you know, I would encourage if there -- when the RFP goes out, or encourage that if Indigenous governments are, you know, wanting to look into this area, you know, those are discussions that, you know, we can have. But at this point I guess the RFP will go out for the schematic design and, you know, later to come back with a plan to build, so. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you, again, for that answer. One of the things in the proposal that was proposed was working with an existing participant in the industry, whether that be Avens for example or different industry that do that work. One of the abilities of having an Indigenous government run the organization would be to allow them to then look at contracting that out with a sunset clause to eventually train people, work with Aurora College, and eventually have local people trained to do that work at first with a contractor and, again, have a sunset clause - 4, 8, 12 years.

Has the department considered working with existing contractors, such as Avens, or working with other, I guess, industry professionals to come in and do that work?

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, just to answer the Member's question, no. But, you know, I think where we are and the service that it's going to provide, you know, we'd always consider all of the different options that are out there. But no, we haven't. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I encourage the department to certainly look at that. I have no other questions other than to say thank you. I appreciate that it's still on the books and still looking to happen. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Member, not a question. Thank you. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife North.

QUESTION 169-20(1):  
IMPROVING LITERACY SKILLS IN THE  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to put the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment back on the hot seat here. Has the Minister considered the implications for the NWT of both the 2012 Supreme Court decision that recognized that learning to read is a basic human right and the Ontario Human Rights Commission's public inquiry into the right to read? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in March of 2022 I delivered a similar Member's statement on the -- sorry, reading being a privilege, and -- or sorry, not being a privilege and being a human right. Jeez, I need to focus here, sorry. And so yes, Mr. Speaker, I've considered the importance of literacy, and I share the Member's concerns.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that we're on the same page here. Can the Minister explain whether the NWT inclusive schooling directive or handbook recognizes that learning to read is a basic human right and therefore a top priority goal for all students? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the ministerial directive calls on all students to have access to quality education programs within a common learning environment in the community in which the student resides, including being able to access instructional and support strategies that remove barriers to learning. Mr. Speaker, when demonstrating a need for extra support, a student support plan with focused supports for difficulty in reading is created to provide supports and reduce barriers in conjunction with the school team and the parent or guardian. ECE offers funding to education bodies for assistive technologies to support the learning goals of students. But I think it's also important that we acknowledge that the demands of teachers have changed over the last few years as have the number of students that are needing access to services. And I think this is also a good point to also talk about the need to ensure that we're getting students to class so that they have access to those supports from their teachers and from their education bodies. Thank you.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So yesterday the Minister told us that when we look

at the achievement tests over the years that have been implemented through Alberta curriculum, things are not seeming to get better; things are not improving.

Can the Minister commit to ensure that our education system is well funded enough to provide the necessary supports and interventions to ensure all students can learn to read? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, ECE allots funding to each education body using the school funding framework. This framework allocates funding equitably and, outside of prescribed funds, allows flexibility to accommodate local decision-making. I will say, Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely more and more demand for dollars within our education system and one of the tasks that's been afforded to me this term is to work on the Education Act, along with our partners, and the school funding formula will be a part of that work. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To drill down to one item that I mentioned in my statement, will the Minister commit to ensuring that all students who require one, will be able to access a speech language pathologist in order to learn to communicate effectively? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this might take me a little bit longer than 30 seconds to answer.

I wish I could say yes to this, but it's not even a million-dollar question; it's a much more than a million-dollar question. It was something that Education, Culture and Employment saw as a need in schools, and so they put together a territorial-based support team with the dream of being able to bring rehabilitation services to schools. That team was originally put in place in Yellowknife with a dream of one day having regional-based territorial support teams so that all schools would have access to the supports that it needs so that students can even begin to access education. That team has never been able to be fully staffed despite the great efforts of Education, Culture and Employment. I know that Health and Social Services also has vacancies within their rehabilitative services team that have been ongoing and chronic vacancies. And so while I would love to say yes to this, and I know that many parents and many students across the territory would love me to say yes to this, it is an effort that we have tried to fill and have not been able to. That said, I see

this as a big deal, and I think that it is a gap that we need to fill and as such, the Minister of Health and Social Services and I, along with each of our teams, have already sat down and started discussions about how we address the need for rehabilitative services in schools. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister for Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 170-20(1):  
REGULATION OF E-SCOOTERS

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I spoke about E-scooters in my Member's statement. And, really, the primary issue is about safety for the public and certainly safety for the people using the E-scooters. I mean, their safety matters too. And I know one size doesn't fit all, Mr. Speaker, so I'm not assuming what policy in Yellowknife would fit Wrigley because that just doesn't make sense. We have to be practical.

So my question for the Minister of Infrastructure, who oversees the Motor Vehicle Act, is what can she do to bring in E-scooters into some form of regulation? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Infrastructure.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, like any other new matter, item, concern, question, safety issue, or otherwise, the process would be the same. Obviously, departments would consider often what's happening in other jurisdictions, could consult locally with municipalities, jurisdictions, regional governments to see what needs there may be.

In this particular instance there is, in fact, quite a number of jurisdictions who are struggling with the question of what to do appropriately to balance considerations for E-scooters. And so the Canadian Council of Motor Transportation Administrators and Transportation Canada have, in fact, struck a task force to look at this very question. And I can assure this House that the Northwest Territories will be participating. Thank you.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If things were only as easy as the stroke of a pen; sometimes they are, but most of the time they're not. Even in Alberta and I believe in BC, and even referenced by ICBC, which is their insurance agent or arm, they recognize E-scooters as motor vehicles. That could be an adjustment in definition and a directive by the Minister through the department that they're

further recognized and follow through with that tent. Is that something the Minister would be willing to examine in this short session we're having to have some action as we proceed into summer where we're really seeing the problem of people using E-scooters when it's nice out. Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again, I had an expectation, given the Member's statement, that this was going to come up today and so I've already been engaging with the department about what the latest is, which is why I've assured that we'll be participating on a national level. But I can also say that in these short time since the Member's statement, I have actually had residents reach out to me and point out that, in their view, having an E-scooter might be more safe to be able to be on bike lanes and to be able to use E-scooters on the bike lane roadway as compared to relying on large vehicles, fossil fuel driven vehicles, providing alternative means of, you know, human motorized transportation, a healthier opportunity. So all of which is to say just when we think one thing is easy, it often doesn't prove to be quite so simple. So, again, we do want to look at what's happening in larger jurisdictions. It's quite common that smaller jurisdictions, not only ours, but others, will look to the larger ones, see what they're doing, try to avoid reinventing wheels, motorized or otherwise, and then try to strike the right balance when we go forward. So I'll certainly commit to going back and having that conversation - where is this at nationally, what are we doing, where do we see ourselves fitting in. But as far as creating a timeline in the space of two to three weeks, that's overambitious. Thank you.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I won't go at length, but I'll say section 246, we talk about how bicycles are clearly not allowed on sidewalks. Section 252, it says pedestrians must look both ways to cross the sidewalk. So, Mr. Speaker, we're regulating pedestrians for goodness sakes but we're allowing E-scooters to proceed in a manner unregulated, which puts us at risk.

Mr. Speaker, my question back to the Minister is, is she willing to examine her authority as Minister to issue a directive to clarify the definition of "vehicle" and could she report that back to the House before the end of this very short session in the interest of public safety? Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to examine my authority in this regard. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 171-20(1):  
IMPROVING MORALE AND RETENTION  
FOR FRONTLINE NURSES

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister of Health and Social Services what her department is doing to improve staff morale and prioritize retention strategies for current frontline nursing staff? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Minister of Health and Social Services.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Sorry, I didn't get the question, Mr. Speaker. If he could repeat it.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you. Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. What is the department doing to improve staff morale and prioritize retention strategies for current frontline nursing staff? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I know that this question came up in the last sitting, and there's things that the department is doing. I know within the NTHSSA, you know, they're doing a lot of communicating with the staff. The level of the communication that is required, I am not familiar of where they are and what is needed and so -- but then the other areas, you know, they've run a lot of different areas where they could support the morale and even to get staff in. I have a whole list of all of that stuff. I've said it in the House before, but I'd have to get back to the Member with all the other information. Thank you.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that's useful to get that information. I left it open ended to see what we'd get back, but I think the nurses need to know what's going on. So will the Minister commit to an investigation, that her office will head up, into staffing conditions at Stanton and throughout the health system and provide an avenue for frontline workers to express their concerns and see some resolution about those concerns? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, every single time I meet with my DM or with the CEOs of the health authorities or the chair, the constant conversation is how are we supporting our staff. And so one of the things that, you know, I hear, you know, that they're not seeing their managers enough. The managers, you know,

are tied up doing a lot of the stuff that they need to be doing with hiring and all of this other stuff. And so, you know, I think one of the things that I would like to do is, you know, the Member has invited me to a constituency meeting, you know, and, you know, I think as well as to hear from the Member exactly -- you know, we hear over and over different areas what the concerns are, and I bring this back to the department. The department, you know, NTHSSA, we go back and forth. And so every time an issue is brought forward to me, I bring it to NTHSSA. So I think this is -- you know, I can sit down with the Member and go over some of the things that he's hearing, and then I can bring those back to the attention and see if they can be resolved. So I'm willing to work with the Member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that would be appreciated. So can the Minister commit to attending a town hall that we can facilitate with nurses in my riding or throughout -- anyone who wants to attend, so she could speak to them directly and answer their concerns? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what I commit to is if he invites me to a constituency meeting, I can attend a constituency meeting, as we do -- as Ministers who -- any Members that request one. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate that. Mr. Speaker, transparency around this is important as well. And I think proactive communication of wait times, daily number of patient visits, gridlock, status of flight availability, all those things need to be made available to frontline workers as well so they know what they're going into on a given day. So can the Minister work with the authority to ensure that staff are to be given more information about their working conditions before they start off on a shift? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you know, I hear the Member, and I know what the nurses get when they come onto shift. As a past nurse, I got shift report. The focus of the frontline nurse is to take care of their patients. You know, but they also need to know what the bigger picture is and that is what my understanding of the weekly emails and the manager's emails that are going to the staff, and if there's more information that they're requiring to do their job to take care of the frontline -- you know, to take care of the

residents, you know, I'm always willing to bring that feedback back. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions. Member from Great Slave.

QUESTION 172-20(1):  
SUSTAINABLE HEALTHCARE  
WORKFORCE

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And this is actually fantastic timing because it'll sort of lead off my questions of yesterday and the Member for Range Lake's questions today. This question is for the Minister of Finance, and I guess I couldn't actually speak to it yesterday anyway. But what specifically does the Minister want to accomplish in this year's budget to prioritize a stable resident health care workforce? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Minister of Finance.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try not to go on for 35 minutes again, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the budget. But on a high level, first of all, if the government has the fiscal capacity to invest in the Northwest Territories and in the people and the residents of the Northwest Territories over the long term in a sustainable way, then we can continue to provide all of the programs and services. We are running up ourselves right now against a situation where we don't have that fiscal capacity year over year and that one bad fire season can wipe us out with nothing left to show for it and nothing left to reinvest, so simply as a starting point.

Now, that said, Mr. Speaker, more specifically, the Department of Health and Social Services, for a very long time and continuing with this budget, receives one-third of the full operating budget of the Government of the Northwest Territories and receives the largest single addition this government had in this particular budget of some, I believe, \$30 million. So in short, we are now still in a position where we're continuing to invest in health and social services. We have the health recruitment unit that is housed between the departments of Finance and Health and Social Services. That will continue, and that will continue to receive the investments in this budget and going forward through departments' efforts. It is seeing successes. We've actually achieved having a net 20 percent gain in recruitment to the health profession.

Mr. Speaker, I realize, and as Members noted, definitely on the last question, we do still have to address morale. We have to address

retention. But we will be in a better position to do that when we have the capacity within the government. So, Mr. Speaker, I realize I've gone on probably longer than you want us to, and I'm going too fast, so I will stop there and wait for the next question. Thank you.

**MS. REID:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And while I understand the Minister is the Minister of Finance, today is budget day, we're talking about dollars, we're talking about investments. I really want to get at the core of what she spoke to at the end of her answer, which is what actionable ways can we start looking at making sure our health care workers are valued in ways that are not dollars ways, that are supporting them to be serving the public in the best way that they can and make sure that their morale is increased? I don't think that necessarily means more people or more staff. I think that means ways of looking at the work culture to improve it. So how can the Minister help our health care workers feel like they are in a safe, inclusive, and stable workplace? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Finance have met several times over the last short while. In fact, quite recently. I have also included meetings with staff from the health care profession. And in the course of those meetings, we are in a place now where we do need -- we've acknowledged, and we know that we need to work together. Taking the work that's already been happening in health recruitment, which has been successful, and now building on it to ensure that we can translate what's happening there and translate that success into one that is building on morale, improving morale, and making sure that the folks that we're recruiting are being retained. So, again, you know, we've had success with the health recruitment unit. That is continuing. That work is reflected in the work of the departments, which is what's reflected in the budgets that we have in front of us. But that is absolutely the next step.

So if I'm hesitant a little, there was a number of items that -- you know, again, it's not about making cuts and it's not about taking things away. We want to look at what we are doing better. One of the things we need to do better is retain -- retaining our staff and perhaps also, if I might, in the health care area, it's in questions of medical travel. Are we getting good service and good value for folks that are put through the system of having to go through medical travel? Those are two areas that are priorities for Health and Social Services and Finance. We are going to be working on them in the next few months. The business planning

process for 2025-2026 starts in the fall. This year, we're a little off cycle, but that's only a few months away, and that is priority one -- or one of the priorities that these two departments are going to be working on as we work to right size the health care budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister commit to bringing back some actions that are tangible, pragmatic, and approach the concerns they're hearing from staff around the idea of morale, around the idea of management training, around the idea of, you know, making sure people are feeling heard and seen? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think the answer is yes; it's how that is really the question here. Just recently the 2023 version of the Employee Engagement and Satisfaction Survey results have come back. I've had a chance to look at my own department's, Mr. Speaker. I often do look at other departments, including, in particular, Health and Social Services and the health authorities. I know other Ministers are doing the same. That is an important starting point. It gives us a sense on a number of indicators, including morale and training and engagement, to be able to connect some of those dots, see where our progress is, see where we're making gains, and see where we are challenged. So certainly we'll say we're going to have to start -- well, no, that is one place we're going to want to start. We are looking at -- as the Department of Finance in terms of what we're doing with our own broader recruitment and retention plans and policies and practices, including management training and including a particular management training and leadership training for Indigenous employees. So these are all areas that exist in our business plans and the work that is happening in departments, it's in the budget, this is what we do as departments, and we'll certainly want to be doing that. So, again, I'll end where I started with a yes, but the how we're going to get there is a much longer answer. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Finance. Final supplementary.

Oral questions. Member from Deh Cho.

QUESTION 173-20(1):  
LACK OF CELLULAR PHONE SERVICE  
ALONG NORTHWEST TERRITORIES  
HIGHWAYS

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my Member's statement I spoke about the lack of cell phone coverage across

the NWT highway system and it being a safety concern for residents. Can the Premier, who is also the Minister of Justice, tell us whether he considers this issue to be a public safety concern? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Deh Cho. Mr. Premier.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that it's clearly a public safety concern. If you need to contact someone because of an accident or because of an incident or because you see a wildfire that you want to report and there's no cell service, then that's an issue. And it's recognized as an issue not just here in the territory but really across Canada, because if you look at a map of cell coverage of Canada most of it is empty. Most rural areas do not have highway cell coverage, so it is a public safety issue that is known across Canada. Thank you.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, and thank you to the Premier for that. Mr. Speaker, can the Premier tell us if there are any plans within the life of the 20th Assembly to improve the telecommunications capabilities within the NWT highway system? Thank you.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And this is actually something that's within the Department of Finance, and the Minister of Finance has answered this question many times before. So I would like to defer to her. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Premier. Minister of Finance.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again echoing what the Premier said already, telecommunications is a known challenge across highways all across the Northwest Territories, across Canada. One of the roles that the Department of Finance has is as the liaison point or an advocacy point with the CRTC. I can say the CRTC recently with their representative member for the region was in the Northwest Territories, and we had an opportunity to meet, and finding a better path for telecommunications was one of the topics on that agenda. One of the challenges we've had -- O and M funding for cell communications towers, just between here and Behchoko, was over \$500,000 per year back in 2021. That has no doubt gone up and would no doubt, of course, be significantly higher if we were to try to cover all of the highways across the North. That said, the federal government does have some pots of funding, which to this point did not apply to telecommunications. They were only available for fibre and for internet communications. We are advocating to see

some change in that regard, if there can be a bigger pot of larger funding from which -- whether it's GNWT or Indigenous governments or regional governments could apply, we might be able to make some traction on this. Thank you.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, and thank you to the Minister of Finance for that. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier commit to work with Cabinet, the private sector, and the federal government to finding solutions to improve cell service on our NWT highways? Thank you.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'd like to send that to the Minister of Finance. Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, at the risk of it, I think I've probably already given away a bit of the answer, and the answer is yes, we will continue to do that work. There are -- there is some interest in the telecommunications space in the Northwest Territories on this but, really, again, there's not a private market that would support having this kind of service in the North. The market is just too small. We will really be looking to the federal government on this one and, again, really partnering likely with regional governments on whose lands or in whose regions these impacts would be most felt. So, you know, happy to go forward and continue to have that, but we are going to, first step, want to continue to advocate that the funding pots available, through ISED or otherwise at the federal government level, can actually apply to telecommunications and so that they can see improvements in this space. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Finance. Final supplementary. Member from Deh Cho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** This question I have is for the Minister of MACA from my -- okay.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I could put you on the list for the next. Thank you. Oral questions. Member from Monfwi.

QUESTION 174-20(1):  
SUPPORTING THE NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES MINING INDUSTRY AND  
EMPLOYEES

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the question is for ITI for the mining industry.

We know there is a set date for a couple of mines in the NWT to close. So with that in mind, I want to ask the Minister how is the Minister working with the mines and the Indigenous

governments to support mine workers in this transition?

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Minister of ITI.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories has a cross-departmental working group because we acknowledge that the impacts of the diamond mine closure date will have an impact on multiple departments. In addition, ITI has regular meetings and meets with Diavik, as have I. I've had four meetings now with Diavik in order to discuss multiple things, closure being one of them. And in the meetings with ITI, they discuss how Diavik is supporting its workers to ensure that we have an understanding of how many people we're talking about at the end of the day, and what they would like to do. And I'll wait for the Member's additional questions to provide more information. Thank you.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Okay, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will ask this question anyways, and I know she likes to talk.

So, Mr. Speaker, our economy is depending on the mining sector. So what is the government doing to ensure the NWT economy can withstand this loss, this loss of labour, and economic development? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a really big question. ITI is constantly working to support other sectors. As well we heard today in the budget address additional dollars going to film. That said, there is an absolute recognition that other sectors within the Northwest Territories do not even begin to replace our mineral resource development sector. And that being said, I think there is also -- it's also important to acknowledge that any other one of our mines do not replace a diamond mine. These are world class billion-dollar diamond mines being operated by huge international companies, and we have been incredibly lucky to be home to three of them over the last two and a half decades. Thank you.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in the NWT we need to retain these mining investments that we have, but the budget doesn't show any increase for mining support. How is the Minister encouraging the diamond mines we have to extend their operating life? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there was just

under \$400,000 mentioned in the budget today that went towards finishing the regulations for the Mineral Resources Act. Our role as government is to create a landscape for development to happen. And in my role as the Minister of ITI, it's a role that I take very seriously and work hard with my colleagues across the floor in order to make sure that I'm keeping my ear to the ground and responding to industry as best as possible and making sure that I'm working with my colleagues to make changes that are being asked of me from the industry. That being said, Mr. Speaker, it's also -- I agree with the Member, it is crucial that we maintain the workers who are working at these mines who are Northerners. Our diamond mines have worked hard to make sure that they are providing learning and training opportunities to Northerners and mines have committed to ensuring that they are maintaining their socio-economic agreements, maintaining their apprentices right up to the final days, and ensuring that they are working together as well so that when Diavik does close its doors, its skilled workforce migrates to, for example, other mines. Some people want to go work for Indigenous governments or for community hamlets. Some people might want to start their own business. And so the question is how do we, together, as Diavik and the Government of the Northwest Territories support residents to stay here, live in the territory, and do the jobs they want to do. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of ITI. Final supplementary. Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister attends conferences to support and development of mining industry in the NWT. Can the Minister describe to the House the outcomes from these conferences and how is the Minister supporting new mines and projects to come online? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Two questions, but I think the Minister can answer that question. Minister of ITI.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I know the House doesn't want me to speak forever so I'm going to keep this short. So how are we supporting mines? We are maintaining relationships with them. We have Pathfinders who support them in order to form relationships and understand our operating system. I have the opportunity to sit down with any industry partner that comes to the territory. I also report on those on our website that hosts all of our meetings so that we are transparent in those. I am -- from those conferences, sorry, I am meeting with mining companies, I am meeting with industry players,

I'm -- I'm also hosting events, Mr. Speaker, where I'm bringing together industry and Indigenous governments and being -- trying to be a person who brings these relationships together and helps people understand who they need to talk to see some of these projects move forward. We're also supporting projects, so supporting projects to access federal funding. We, as ITI, do letters of support through the Critical Minerals Infrastructure Fund, for example. Sorry, I'm talking too fast, I'm getting excited. And then, Mr. Speaker, we also ensure that we are funding exploration through our mining incentive program. And we do what we can to make sure that we are supporting an environment for industry to come set up in the Northwest Territories, form relationships with Indigenous governments, and see a project through to a producing mine. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister for Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Sahtu.

QUESTION 175-20(1):  
MARINE TRANSPORTATION SERVICES  
2024 SEASON CANCELLATIONS

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As follow-up there to the cancellation of yesterday's disturbing news beyond our control, the cancellation of the MTS barging schedule. To answer some of the many questions that I've been getting so far is to get a grasp on how much cargo is sitting at the Hay River terminal destined for the Sahtu, and my question to the Minister of Infrastructure is if I can get that information to help and assist in providing options of shipment to the requests that I'm getting. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Minister of Infrastructure.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, and firstly, absolutely happy to provide a more detailed inventory not on the floor of the House. I've already committed that our officials from the Department of Infrastructure would be reaching out to regional leadership, regional SAOs to have sort of technical conversation and at then looking forward to having a chance directly to speak with leadership and with the MLA.

At this point, the information we have is that there actually is only a small amount of cargo at the MTS shipping yard, no doubt owing to communications we've put out earlier about, you know, being aware that we were really watching and monitoring water levels. At this point, the options would be either to leave that cargo for arrangements on the winter road or to -- you know, to look to have it shipped up in



some other capacity, particularly by going over the top which is maybe not the easiest at this point. But they can leave it there, or they could certainly leave it for next year. So that will depend on each customer and on what they have. Again, right now, there's not a whole lot there. Thank you.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the Minister for that availability.

My next question is, will the Department of Infrastructure, MTS, be working with, say, Water Surveys Canada to analyze the depths of water between the Dempster Highway and the community of Fort Good Hope to get an analytic ease of comfort if there is water levels there to support the tug boats needed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fort Good Hope is still on track and fully expected to receive their barging services coming down from the top. So at this point -- and we do work -- the Department of Infrastructure and ECE and their hydrologists do connect and receive water reports regularly, so I could certainly perhaps share that. That might provide some additional comfort to the MLA. And, again, through the leadership channels that was mentioned earlier to ensure that everyone's aware of what we're monitoring, what's able. But at this moment, the information I have fresh off of the moment is that, indeed, the Fort Good Hope shipment is expected to be on track. Thank you.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the Minister is if she can cooperate with my office and identify or developing a protocol of communications for the customers in Fort Good Hope and south of the two sets of rapids, Norman Wells and the community of Tulita, on working with a communicate with the air barge company. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am aware of the air barge offers that are out there. Again, it is a private company that is offering those services. So where and how exactly that might fit into a government communication, I want to be just a bit cautious on. That said, I know the MLA's office and my office worked together this past winter when we were adjusting the winter road season as well as when we were adjusting to fly fuel into some communities when there were some shortages owing to last year's challenges. So both of those occasions, those types of pathways actually worked very well, and I heard that ultimately the winter road season, because of the communications, was very successful, residents saw that they had

their concerns addressed. So very happy to do that again. It worked well once, twice, and will certainly work well again a third time. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister for Infrastructure. Oral questions. Member from the Deh Cho.

QUESTION 176-20(1):  
SUPPORT FOR DISPLACED RESIDENTS  
OF ENTERPRISE

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And continuing from my Member's statement yesterday to the Minister of MACA, can the Minister explain what discussions have taken place with the federal government regarding supports for the displaced residents of Enterprise and also, specifically, which federal departments have been engaged on this? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Deh Cho. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

**HON. VINCE MCKAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the department and the GNWT engage directly with the Privy Council's Office, Public Safety Canada, CIRNAC, and Indigenous Services on the availability of federal programs to assist uninsured homes and businesses impacted by the 2023 wildfires with financial assistance to rebuild. The GNWT also asked those departments to engage with other federal departments and agencies, such as CMHC. They explored the other federal programs to see if they could assist with the recovery. The GNWT was advised by the PSO and the PSC that they have explored all options across the federal government and confirmed that there was no other federal programs available to assist with rebuilding uninsured homes and businesses in those affected areas.

MACA currently has been providing temporary accommodations to all affected residents through the assistance provided. And currently any resident who is uninsured is being taken care of with a place to stay at this time. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 177-20(1):  
LICENSING REQUIREMENTS FOR  
INTERNATIONALLY EDUCATED NURSES

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know, I don't know, I try to temper my

enthusiasm but it's hard. So excited. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Social Services. And I'm sure it will be no surprise I'm going to ask a question regarding the nursing association and the fact that they put that obstructive wall of 1,125 hours in front of an internationally trained competent nurse, who could practice any day of the week here, any day, and they've been approved in Ontario and in Alberta but yet there seems to be some bottleneck about saying you cannot get a license in the Northwest Territories unless you already have practically six months of experience elsewhere, which is a shame.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the Minister is what is she doing about this to solve this gatekeeper problem that's restricting people who want to live and invest in the Northwest Territories, grow their families, by being refused the opportunity to practice here? Because if they leave, they're not probably going to come back. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Member from Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Health and Social Services.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'll give credit where it's due. Thank you to the Member for raising this issue and continuing to raise this issue.

I've actually had conversations with my department on this. I've had conversation was the Minister of ECE who deals with immigration. We are actually scheduling a meeting with CAN to go over a lot of the things that are under the International Educated Nurses and so we could fully understand what is needed in there. And I'll -- you know, I understand that this 1,125 hours is here. And one of the things with this is right now where we are as a territory is we are not Ontario. We are -- we are a small 40,000 population. And if an international educated nurse goes into Ontario, they have bridging programs, they have mentors, they have stable -- more stable workforce. Here in the Northwest Territories, we just talked about morale, we talked about burnout, we talked about all of these things that we're putting on our nurses that are here working. We have nurses that are here mentoring our Aurora College nursing students. And so we have to look at this, and we have to figure this out and how we can support it. So I'll just leave it there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Minister acknowledging we're not Ontario. But if Ontario can -- you can submit your application in the morning and have it licensed by the afternoon, I mean, maybe that

doesn't fit us. That said, Alberta does. And we often look to Alberta as the option or similarities as to where we do. And the last point I'll make, Mr. Speaker, is I can't imagine a doctor being told go find 1,125 Canadian hours, even though you qualify everywhere in Canada but here, and then come back when you're ready. So we've refused them. It's about standard of fairness, Mr. Speaker.

So my question back to it is the department has relinquished some of its authority under Bill 77 under the last government. That said, what directive can you send to the nursing association to eliminate this useless barrier that doesn't treat people fairly. Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for the Member. And, you know, when we talk about doctors, doctors have mentors. They have programs in place to mentor new doctors. They have residency programs within the territory as well. So with this issue, you know, like I said, I will be getting more information. We will be getting with CAN. We will be discussing this. I am going along with my colleague as well so that we can make sure that we have a full understanding of what it is and what needs to happen for here in the Northwest Territories. At the end of the day, it's making sure that everybody that's working in our area in the health field -- and not saying that the people that are waiting to fall into this group of people that want to work in the Northwest Territories but, you know, that everything is met before we have them taking care of our residents in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm asking the Minister, are you committed to see the elimination of this policy; this unbiassed, unfair, and unreasonable policy, because we're talking about our friends, our neighbours, our community is suffering and hurting more because we cannot allow these people in. Is the Minister committed to the elimination of that policy?

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and I will repeat myself that we are looking at all the options. I will not put a nurse in front of patients unless we know that this 1,125 hours -- if it's not necessary, then I'll look at it if it's not necessary. But I don't have the full picture right now so I can't make that decision on the floor here today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, competency isn't the question here. So when you say I don't want to put a nurse in front of anybody who is not able to, no one here wants that. So let's make sure that's clear. If Alberta finds them competent skill wise, their international skills, whether they trained in the UK, India, Australia, United States, and they're supported in Alberta and Ontario, they must be okay by their standards. Can we not mirror their process because their competencies say yes?

Mr. Speaker, my question is this isn't a competency issue. This is they can be qualified anywhere else, but the Northwest Territories based on their screening. Why can't we mirror that? If they're approved elsewhere, approve them here. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again, Ontario, Alberta, they have bridging programs, they have mentors, they have staff that will support new grads. We can't even -- like, that's one of the things in the Northwest Territories. One of the things in my past management job is new grads. We have to find ways for new grads to be mentored into the workforce. When the nurses come out of school, some of them don't have the experience. They have a lot of theory. You know, there's many different things in play. It's not about just getting a license. It's about getting a license and being put into the system. And we are looking at it, and that's where I'll end. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Colleagues, time is up for oral questions. And on that note, we'll have a -- Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to return to item number 9 on the orders of the day, oral questions.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Member from Frame Lake has asked for unanimous consent to come back to number 9 on the orders. Any nays?

Nay has been said, so we will not be moving.

So we will have a brief recess, and we'll come back and finish the day.

---BRIEF RECESS

**MR. SPEAKER:** Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of committee on the review of bills. Reports on standing and special committees. Tabling of documents. Mr. Premier.

## Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 92-20(1):  
FOLLOW-UP LETTER FOR ORAL  
QUESTION 89-20(1): WILDFIRE MOTION

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: Follow-up Letter for Oral Question 89-20(1): Wildfire Motion Response. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Tabling of documents. Minister of Finance.

TABLED DOCUMENT 93-20(1):  
2024-2025 MAIN ESTIMATES

TABLED DOCUMENT 94-20(1):  
2024-2028 BUSINESS PLANS

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following two documents: 2024-2025 Main Estimates and the 2024-2028 Business Plans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you. Tabling of documents. Member from Deh Cho.

TABLED DOCUMENT 95-20(1):  
PHOTOGRAPHS OF MACKENZIE RIVER

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to table photographs showing the current low water levels on the Mackenzie River. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Member from Deh Cho. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Member from Range Lake.

## Notices of Motion

MOTION 26-20(1):  
REFERRAL OF TABLED DOCUMENT 94-  
20(1): 2024-2028 BUSINESS PLANS, TO  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**MR. TESTART:** Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Tuesday, May 28th, 2024, I will move the following motion:

Now therefore I move, seconded by the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, that Tabled Document 94-20(1): 2024 to 2028 Business Plans, be referred to Committee of the Whole for consideration. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you. Notices of motion. Motions. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, Minister's Statement

4-20(1), Minister's Statement 5-20(1), Minister's Statement 17-20(1), Minister's Statement 24-20(1), with the Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh in the chair.

### Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** I now call Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of the committee? And I'll go to Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I move that the chair rise and report progress.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** There's a motion on the floor to report progress. The motion is in order and non-debatable. All those in favour? All those opposed? Okay, the motion is carried.

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress. Thank you.

---BRIEF RECESS

### Report of Committee of the Whole

**MR. SPEAKER:** May I have report of Committee of the Whole. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Minister's Statement 4-20(1), Minister's Statement 5-20(1), Minister's Statement 17-20(1), and Minister's Statement 24-20(1), and would like to report progress. And, Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Do I have a seconder? Member from Frame Lake. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions?

Report of Committee of the Whole. Third reading of bills. Orders of the day, Mr. Clerk.

### Orders of the Day

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight will meet at the rise of the House today.

Orders of the day for Monday, May 27th, 2024, at 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer

2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Replies to the Budget Address, Day 2 of 7
7. Acknowledgements
8. Oral Questions
9. Written Questions
10. Returns to Written Questions
11. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
12. Petitions
13. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
14. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
15. Tabling of Documents
16. Notices of Motion
17. Motions
  - Motion 25-20(1): Referral of Tabled Document 67-20(1): Northwest Territories 2023 to 2027, to Committee of the Whole
18. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
19. First Reading of Bills
20. Second Reading of Bills
21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
  - Minister's Statement 4-20(1): 2023 Wildfire Season Review and Planning for the 2024 Season
  - Minister's Statement 5-20(1): Emergency Management Preparation
  - Minister's Statement 17-20(1): Reaching Average \$10 a Day Child Care in the NWT
  - Minister's Statement 24-20(1): Health Human Resources Recruitment and Retention
  - Tabled Document 93-20(1): 2024-2025 Main Estimates

22. Report of the Committee of the Whole

23. Third Reading of Bills

24. Orders of the Day

” Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Colleagues, this House stands adjourned until Monday, May 27, 2024, at 1:30 p.m. Please enjoy your weekend.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 1:31 p.m.