



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
**LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY**

1st Session

Day 43

20th Assembly

HANSARD

Wednesday, February 12, 2025

Pages 1749 - 1784

The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Members of the Legislative Assembly

Speaker
Hon. Shane Thompson
(Nahendeh)

Hon. Caitlin Cleveland
(Kam Lake)
*Minister of Education, Culture and
Employment*
*Minister of Industry, Tourism and
Investment*

Mr. Richard Edjericon
(Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh)

Mr. Robert Hawkins
(Yellowknife Centre)

Hon. Lucy Kuptana
(Nunakput)
*Minister responsible for Housing
Northwest Territories*
*Minister responsible for the Status of
Women*

Hon. Jay Macdonald
(Thebacha)
*Minister of Environment and Climate
Change*

Hon. Vince McKay
(Hay River South)
*Minister of Municipal and Community
Affairs*
*Minister responsible for the Workers'
Safety and Compensation
Commission*
*Minister responsible for the Public
Utilities Board*

Mr. Danny McNeely
(Sahtu)

Ms. Shauna Morgan
(Yellowknife North)

Mr. Julian Morse
(Frame Lake)

Mr. George Nerysoo
(Mackenzie Delta)

Ms. Kate Reid
(Great Slave)

Mr. Denny Rodgers
(Inuvik Boot Lake)

Hon. Lesa Semmler
(Inuvik Twin Lakes)
Minister of Health and Social Services

Hon. R.J. Simpson
(Hay River North)
Premier
Government House Leader
*Minister of Executive and Indigenous
Affairs*
Minister of Justice

Mr. Kieron Testart
(Range Lake)

Hon. Caroline Wawzonek
(Yellowknife South)
Deputy Premier
Minister of Finance
Minister of Infrastructure
*Minister responsible for the NWT Power
Corporation*

**Mrs. Jane Weyallon
Armstrong**
(Monfwi)

Mrs. Sheryl Yakeleya
(Dehcho)

Officers

Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
Mr. Glen Rutland

Deputy Clerks
Mr. Alex Mulooki (acting)
Mr. Harjot Sidhu

Clerk of Journals
Mr. Michael Ball

Committee Clerks
Mr. Paul Mercredi
Mr. Angus Wilson

Law Clerks
Mr. Toby Kruger
Ms. Sandra Mackenzie

Box 10
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
Tel: (867) 767-9010 Fax: (867) 920-4735 Toll-Free: 1-800-661-0784
www.ntassembly.ca

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRAYER OR REFLECTION	1749
MINISTERS' STATEMENTS	1749
MINISTER'S STATEMENT 93-20(1): RESPECTING TRADITION, BUILDING A STRONG FUTURE: NWT'S COMMITMENT TO INDIGENOUS- LED STEWARDSHIP	1749
MEMBERS' STATEMENTS	1750
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 484-20(1): AURORA POLYTECHNIC TRANSITION	1750
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 485-20(1): OFFICE OF INTEGRATED SERVICES DELIVERY	1751
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 486-20(1): AURORA COLLEGE COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES CLOSURE	1751
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 487-20(1): TRADES AND LABOUR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FOR NORMAN WELLS OILFIELD REMEDIATION AND RECLAMATION	1752
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 488-20(1): HOUSING SUPPORT FOR DECHCHO RESIDENTS	1752
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 489-20(1): IMPLEMENTATION OF UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES	1752
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 490-20(1): INUVIK BYPASS ROAD	1753
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 491-20(1): STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP PROJECT	1753
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 492-20(1): CHALLENGES OF CONSENSUS GOVERNMENT	1754
MEMBER'S STATEMENT 493-20(1): RETIREMENT OF GARY SCHAUERTE	1754
ORAL QUESTIONS.....	1756
QUESTION 491-20(1): HOUSING NORTHWEST TERRITORIES POLICIES REGARDING EVICTIONS	1756
QUESTION 492-20(1): INUVIK BYPASS ROAD	1757
QUESTION 493-20(1): DRAFT CLIMATE ACTION PLAN PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND FEEDBACK	1757
QUESTION 494-20(1): AURORA COLLEGE COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES CLOSURES	1758
QUESTION 495-20(1): PUBLICATION OF NORTRAN PROGRAM	1758
QUESTION 496-20(1): IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES	1759
QUESTION 497-20(1): IMPROVING NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HEALTHCARE CARDS	1760
QUESTION 498-20(1): STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP PROJECT LEASES	1761
QUESTION 499-20(1): NORTHWEST TERRITORIES EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE AGREEMENT	1762
QUESTION 500-20(1): STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP PROJECT	1763
QUESTION 501-20(1): AURORA COLLEGE POLYTECHNIC TRANSITION	1764
QUESTION 502-20(1): STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP PROJECT	1765
QUESTION 503-20(1): STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP PROJECT	1766
QUESTION 504-20(1): NORTHWEST TERRITORIES EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE AGREEMENT	1766
QUESTION 505-20(1): INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT POLICY	1767
QUESTION 506-20(1): STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE NORTHERN BONUS DISCONTINUATION	1768
RECOGNITION OF VISITORS IN THE GALLERY (REVERSION)	1769
TABLING OF DOCUMENTS	1769
TABLED DOCUMENT 289-20(1): GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES RESPONSE TO COMMITTEE REPORT 9-20(1): REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF BILL 8: AN ACT TO AMEND THE STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE ACT	1769
TABLED DOCUMENT 290-20(1): LETTER FROM NORTHWEST TERRITORIES FAMILY VIOLENCE SHELTER NETWORK REGARDING BUILDING SHELTER CAPACITY FUNDING	1769
CONSIDERATION IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE OF BILLS AND OTHER MATTERS	1770
REPORT OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE	1782
ORDERS OF THE DAY	1782

YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Wednesday, February 12, 2025****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, Mr. Testart, Hon. Shane Thompson, Hon. Caroline Wawzonek, Mrs. Weyallon Armstrong, Mrs. Yakeleya

The House met at 1:31 p.m.

Prayer or Reflection

---Prayer or reflection

SPEAKER (HON. SHANE THOMPSON):

Please be seated. Thank you. I'd like to thank Elder Lafferty for the opening prayer and reflections.

Colleagues, before we get into our business today, we have some special guests up in our audience, the 2025 Ontario Legislature Internship Program participants. And some of you had the opportunity to meet with them, and these are pretty amazing young people that have given us this opportunity to come here and see our great government work, how consensus government works. So I'd like to recognize them, and if I butcher their names -- I told them on Monday and I said it on Tuesday, I apologize now, but we'll just go from there --

- Madeline Ritter, or Maddie
- Annie Dowd
- James Liao
- Megan Ryan-Iloyd
- Nika Lennox
- Alex Salton
- Sayyidah Jaffer
- Ayesha Ali
- Catilin Arizala

I apologize for that one; that one's even worse than the other one.

So I'd like to welcome you to our Assembly and hope you are enjoying yourself, and you've taken a different path instead of the one you normally did and see the whole beautiful city of Yellowknife. So welcome here.

Ministers' statements. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Ministers' Statements

**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 93-20(1):
RESPECTING TRADITION, BUILDING A
STRONG FUTURE: NWT'S COMMITMENT
TO INDIGENOUS-LED STEWARDSHIP**

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to highlight one of the most significant achievements of 2024: The finalization of the Our Land for the Future Agreement, formerly called the NWT Project Finance for Permanence Agreement.

This landmark initiative is a monumental achievement for Indigenous peoples in the Northwest Territories, fostering Indigenous-led conservation, stewardship, and economic development. The GNWT had the honour of supporting this transformative initiative in partnership with 23 Indigenous governments, the Government of Canada, and private donors. Through the process of finalizing the agreement, the GNWT worked closely with Indigenous governments, NGOs, industry leaders, and local communities. Extensive consultations ensured that this initiative aligns with Indigenous priorities and balances conservation efforts with the community economic opportunities. Not only is Our Land for the Future a testament to the strength of true collaboration but also a clear example of what can be accomplished when Members of the Legislative Assembly unite behind a common goal.

Mr. Speaker, as we all can remember, advancing this agreement required substantial effort to develop new legislation enabling the creation of a trust. I am proud that the Members came together to move this critical legislation forward at an accelerated pace, ensuring that the benefits of the agreement could be realized as quickly as possible. This achievement highlights our shared commitment to working with Indigenous governments to do what is best for NWT residents and communities.

The funding, \$300 million from the Government of Canada and \$75 million from private donors,

will facilitate the establishment of Indigenous protected and conserved areas, Indigenous guardian's programs, and climate resilience and tourism projects.

Mr. Speaker, the benefits will be transformative. Our Land for the Future will create jobs in small communities across the NWT while promoting sustainable stewardship of NWT lands and resources. Investments in Indigenous-led conservation efforts will enhance community health and well-being for future generations, contributing to cultural continuity in the territory.

Implementation is already underway, with funding anticipated to flow in mid-2025. The GNWT will continue to collaborate with Indigenous governments, industry, and stakeholders to ensure that the benefits of this agreement reach all NWT residents.

This achievement brings the Government of the Northwest Territories closer to fulfilling its mandate commitment to enhance reconciliation while supporting sustainable economic development and environmental stewardship in the territory. It is a monumental accomplishment for Indigenous peoples, and the GNWT is honored to be part of it. Together, we will work to create opportunities for Northerners that ensure a prosperous and sustainable future for all NWT residents. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Frame Lake.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 484-20(1): AURORA POLYTECHNIC TRANSITION

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was speaking about the polytechnic transition and wasn't able to fully finish out my thoughts, and I wanted to share those today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that when I'm advocating for the polytechnic transition, I am not advocating for something that would be a zero sum game where some communities lose, one community gains. That is a restrictive vision, and I'm tired of it going around because what I want to advocate for is something expansive. This is not about concentrating resources in one community, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when I think of an expansive vision of the college, I think of something like establishing an ENRTP program which they've talked about doing and which I'm a graduate of,

one that would bring students into various communities in the territory. Imagine that program bringing students up to Inuvik for a year and having them work on High Arctic research with whales, with the ocean, with things like that, and then moving around to different communities, working with elders, working in different ways.

Mr. Speaker, imagine a governance program that did something similar, a governance program which taught students about the various different governance models being established in the Northwest Territories and embedded them in those systems, a program which brought students into the communities and have them working with people who are doing the work of implementing governance right now. That would be a very exciting and attractive program. I think of students graduating from a program like that, the employability that they would have. This is the kind of programming that I think people would come from around the world to experience.

And when we think about our community governments, they are constantly coming to us and talking about capacity building. Imagine a program that embedded graduates and embedded students in these governments and helped them work with that capacity building and helped them work with that government. I think that's something that students from this territory could get very excited about. It would prepare them for careers in these governments. That's the kind of thing that we need to be doing. I think it would be very exciting, Mr. Speaker, and I hope we get on with it.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to highlight the fact that Yellowknife's campus is inadequate, and I want us to seek funding to improve it. That was clearly laid out in the facility's master plan, and I think we need to go through with that. But it's not about taking from someone else and giving to another.

Look at the situation we're in with the CLCs. We need programming that works for the communities too. We have to be thinking about everybody when we're thinking about a vision for the college. I think it's clear, and it was clear in the foundational review, that the college as it is is not working for the best interests of the whole territory. The vision that I want to work for and what I want to change is that narrative itself. So let's get together, let's do expansive visioning for this program, for this college, and let's get a polytechnic university that we can all be proud of. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Members' statements. Member from Range Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 485-20(1):
OFFICE OF INTEGRATED SERVICES
DELIVERY

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, perception is everything. How we view the world around us determines how we live our lives. Our perception of the challenges and opportunities we face every day informs our actions and thus plays a major role in each situation's outcome. Many Northerners face challenges in which often the last resort they approach the GNWT for solutions. In tough times, there's already a feeling of desperation so the perception that these services are difficult to access can be a serious detriment to whether or not a service actually reaches the person it's intended for.

Unfortunately, the often Byzantine nature of our departments can make these services appear out of reach - high, aloft, separate, confusing towers of bureaucracy that must be scaled through confusing applications, intimidating policies, and frantic searches for the relevant staff. This is precisely how government silos make delivery of vital services difficult especially when the trickiest situations call for access to multiple programs which exist across different departments.

Honourable Members have all worked with constituents facing these tough times who feel frustrated because they perceive the solutions are obscured behind unnecessarily complicated barriers. They may need access to public housing, social services, income assistance, or to be connected to an NGO in their community, but the policies, programs, and paperwork seem too overwhelming and, sadly, our constituents may not get the help they need on time.

Thankfully, our government has created the Office of Integrated Service Delivery. This was created to specialize in breaking down departmental barriers and provide resources and knowledge in services offered by both government and non-government organizations. This is a tool I referred Range Lakers to when complicated constituency files require more support. Very rarely do constituents come back from the integrated services unit without the support they needed broken down for them in easy to follow strategies. Even when a constituent does not meet the threshold for ISD, staff are more than happy to provide some quick, crucial advice or a package of programs and applications that would have otherwise taken much effort to gather.

Let's all celebrate the innovative nature of this office and all the hard work staff there do to ensure the services each department works

hard maintaining are wildly accessible to those who need them. The success of this unit here in Yellowknife is a model for the entire territory, and I hope we will see more of it in the years to come. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Members' statements. Member from Monfwi.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 486-20(1):
AURORA COLLEGE COMMUNITY
LEARNING CENTRES CLOSURE

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Mr. Speaker, I'll do this in my language for the opening comment -- I mean for the opening of the statement.

Mr. Speaker, [No translation provided].

Mr. Speaker -- I'll do it in English now -- a few days ago, last week, in response to questions about the closure of the community learning centre, the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment mentioned that a GNWT in What We Heard report and the 2024 facility report. Mr. Speaker, we can see from these reports that learning centres are at the heart of college programming in small communities. Of the 19 centres being closed, the facility report notes that 12 standalone CLC facilities were constructed between 1967 and 2011 and are in various states of repair. Seven CLC centres share space in GNWT owned or community facilities. This is the case for the Whati centre which is located within Mezi Community School. Mr. Speaker, can I have unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Okay, Mr. Speaker. According to the What We Heard report published in April 2024, awareness of CLC program is currently perceived as low but the report states partnering with local governments will strengthen the presence of Aurora College in communities. The CLC are currently run by full-time community adult educator as well visiting instructors who deliver short courses and workshop.

Mr. Speaker, instructors in small communities can direct our youth towards trades and professionals. We need more specialized programming like training for the office workers and apprenticeship. I will have question for the Minister of ECE at the appropriate time. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Members' statements. Member from Sahtu.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 487-20(1):
TRADES AND LABOUR WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT FOR NORMAN WELLS
OILFIELD REMEDIATION AND
RECLAMATION

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Norman Wells oil field resource revenues. Mr. Speaker, the Norman Wells oil field celebrated its century anniversary in 2021. Mr. Speaker, this legacy oil field is unique in many ways within the industry. The resource is of high quality, sweet, light crude, with low viscosity and low refining costs.

Mr. Speaker, another unique view or perspective is the ownership structure. The federal government retains or owns subsurface rights and, with a joint operating agreement with Imperial Oil, retains two-thirds.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the NWT Land and Resource Devolution Agreement, the Norman Wells proven area remains under federal jurisdiction. Mr. Speaker, the resource revenues are significant, over \$2 billion over 40 years. This structure, Mr. Speaker, opens the doors for closure and reclamation opportunities. Mr. Speaker, my office authorized NORTRAN a training readiness plan for remediation and reclamation. Mr. Speaker, the Sahtu region is filled with remediation sites. And, Mr. Speaker, combining our efforts to address the trades workforce shortages through a design-build approach for a new trades training tech school in Norman Wells is not only innovative but realistic on approaching our federal counterparts to redirect resource revenues to the O and M of NORTRAN. Later, Mr. Speaker, I will have questions to the appropriate Minister. Mahsi.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 488-20(1):
HOUSING SUPPORT FOR DECHCHO
RESIDENTS

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. [No translation provided].

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to talk about housing support for residents in the Deh Cho. Mr. Speaker, I'm worried about the communities in my riding. Enterprise residents should not feel abandoned by this government as they look for solutions after losing their homes during the 2023 wildfire. Many of them are currently living in Hay River wondering when they can move back home. I have heard from other constituents in housing in Deh Cho

communities who have received eviction notices during the winter.

Mr. Speaker, according to the rental office annual report for 2023-2024, the number of eviction orders issued decreased by 39.6 percent. Even though eviction rates went down, people are still being evicted. I want to know why these evictions are happening now during the winter months. Many of these people have arrears but they're willing to pay to stay in their home. I want to know how we can help these people. The NWT rental office must hold hearings with landlords and tenants before determining an eviction order should be made. I want to ensure residents in small communities have a voice.

Mr. Speaker, I've heard from constituents in NWT Housing who have lost their jobs or who have taken on a caregiver role for family members, and their rents have not been reduced. The cost of living is getting higher, is becoming harder and harder to find solutions, and we need to work together to help these constituent residents of the NWT. I will have questions for the Minister of housing at the appropriate time, Mr. Speaker. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Deh Cho. Members' statements. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 489-20(1):
IMPLEMENTATION OF UNITED NATIONS
DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

MR. EDJERICON: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. In 2023, the 19th Assembly passed Bill 85, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Implementation Act. I was here when this happened, Mr. Speaker. It was a momentous occasion that promised to be very beneficial to First Nations, Metis, and Inuit governments across the North.

The UNDRIP declaration provides a framework for a reconciliation, healing, and peace. It reaffirms the right of Indigenous people recognizing the section 35 of the Canadian Constitution. After that vote in the previous Assembly, work must be done to factor this declaration into all decisions. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission highlighted this in their Calls to Action as well.

Mr. Speaker, all MLAs in this House made an oath to honour and respect the treaty signed with Indigenous people when they took office. The treaties were always the law of the land. They backed up by international legal standards which were reaffirmed through in this chamber.

Furthermore, Indigenous governments and organizations across the territory had also signed NWT Council of Leadership Memorandum of Understanding so we could have a meaningful way to measure true reconciliation.

It was reported on Thursday that the Government of the Northwest Territories is expected to spend \$2.5 billion in 2025-2026. The majority of that money will come from the federal Government of Canada transfer. For every dollar in the federal transfer, it works out to 76 cents from the Crown of Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, more than 50 percent of our population is Indigenous, Metis, and Inuit, and yet the GNWT does not consult with Indigenous governments about how to use that money they receive from the federal government even though much of the transfer to the GNWT is supposed to fund their services. Therefore, the GNWT budget still fails treaty rights by refusing to recognize the intent of these transfers and ignores duties to consult Indigenous governments on how these funds should be spent in contravention of UNDRIP. According to the action plan committee 2024 annual report, an action plan still has not been published and implementation of UNDRIP remains unfinished. This continued lack of consultation -- Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my Member's statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you, Members. According to the action plan committee of 2024 annual report, an action plan has still not been published and remains unfinished. This lack -- continued lack of consultation persists in many other ways such as through the scrapping of the affirmative action policy without asking Indigenous governments and Aurora College closing 19 community learning centres in Indigenous communities which will come at total surprise. I will have questions for the Minister at the appropriate time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Members' statements. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 490-20(1):
INUVIK BYPASS ROAD

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I know the Members have heard me speak of this topic several times in this House. I know the previous MLA for Inuvik has brought it up as well, and that's the state of the Inuvik Bypass Road, Mr. Speaker.

In Inuvik, this is the final extension of the Dempster Highway used by trucks, but not only used by heavy equipment and vehicles coming into the community, Mr. Speaker, it's also used -- people use it for walks, they use it for recreation, the schools use it for their running clubs, it's used by -- for a lot of different things in the community, Mr. Speaker.

Safety is also an issue there, Mr. Speaker, with vehicles coming through there on a regular basis, both for the vehicles and for the pedestrians that walk on it. And, Mr. Speaker, not to mention the dust that it causes in the community all summer long. So, Mr. Speaker, I'm hoping with the completion of the Inuvik runway expansion -- and I know the next phase, Mr. Speaker, is to have that runway paved. That project, by the way, which was done on time and on budget and provided economic benefit to both Indigenous governments in Inuvik. So I'm hoping, Mr. Speaker, when we do that paving of that runway then the department will also consider finally paving the Inuvik Bypass Road, Mr. Speaker. And the Inuvik Bypass Road is an arterial pass highway under the highway designation and classification regulations. So, Mr. Speaker, I will hopefully only have one question for the Minister of Infrastructure this afternoon. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife North.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 491-20(1):
STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

MS. MORGAN: Mr. Speaker, I want to speak today about the Stanton P3 project, the biggest infrastructure project the GNWT has ever undertaken, now estimated to cost at least \$1.2 billion.

I'm not here to just wag my finger. I want to focus on the value of government publicly admitted its mistakes, which we are often so afraid to do. If this government wants us to take seriously its ambitions to build three new multi-billion-dollar megaprojects, including highways and the Taltson expansion, it needs to address head on what went wrong with the Stanton P3. It's so obviously absurd that we are now subleasing from a private company a building that we still own at a cost of \$78 million over 30 years. By refusing to consider the Liwego'ati Building as part of the P3 project, the government is refusing to report publicly on the sublease which, frankly, only adds to the scandal instead of shielding the government from it.

When the lease was signed with Ventura in 2016, the government didn't analyze the value of just keeping the building. It was well known as early as 2014 that the government needed more space for health care services. So, of course, if raises eyebrows when only a year after signing the lease we lease the building right back. We still don't even know how that decision was made, who made it, whether the person who signed the sublease even had the authority to sign it.

Who or what are we protecting by refusing to acknowledge mistakes?

The legacy of this trail of irresponsible decision-making is found all over this budget that's before us. It's a huge part of our interest payments and debt that us bumping up against our debt ceiling. It would be one thing if the new Stanton Building and the Liwego'ati Building were running smoothly, but both buildings have been plagued with serious plumbing, heating, wastewater, and mold issues. We have entire wings of the cavernous new hospital, as well as wings of Liwego'ati, sitting empty because we don't have the staff or resources to use them.

Now, ideally, we would unshackle ourselves from this 30-year payout to Ventura; however, there was indication from the infrastructure deputy minister during the public briefing that there might be no exit mechanism in the lease. That, too, needs to become part of the public reckoning on this issue. I ask this government, Mr. Speaker, to earn our confidence by fully admitting its mistakes. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 492-20(1):
CHALLENGES OF CONSENSUS
GOVERNMENT

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak to some of the challenges of consensus government today, somewhat of the fundamental lacks or concerns I'm seeing.

In my 14th year, I've personally never seen -- or I want to stress or felt -- it being so ineffective or paternalistic in many ways. And, again, I'm saying I've seen and I've felt. Mr. Speaker, when I watch two-thirds of Members want to support something and it seems to paralyze Members or the Assembly to the point it has to be watered down so far it becomes meaningless, it questions what value do Members at large present here.

Mr. Speaker, we can all get behind motherhood issues or big cause issues; I mean it's like

saying who would be in favour of cancer. Of course no one. It's easy to get behind those things. But when we talk about tough issues, government issues, legislative issues, we seem to be paralyzed, and it's always us against them.

Mr. Speaker, when the government brings forward its budget that's 99 percent done and then they ask us what do you think -- by the way it's printed and ready to be handed out -- it's not here for consultation; it's more of a drive by, just to answer a clarification, a few questions here or there. So when the government says we're cutting \$150 million out of the budget over three years, it's more of a this is what we're doing, this is what we're doing, as opposed to what do you think. I mean, Mr. Speaker, when they expand the debt wall, they don't come to Members and say this is how much we're asking for and this is why. It's we've expanded the debt wall and we're asking for it, that's all you get.

Mr. Speaker, there are many examples of this when you are in a Member's side of the House that you just get told how things are going to be.

Mr. Speaker, 12 ridings are not represented in Cabinet. That's 63 percent of northern voices go silent, and we constantly have to be relentless trying to get the attention of the government.

When the Premier-wannabes asked me a question about what would I like to see in this coming Assembly, I was elated by the opportunity to express what my experience has seen. And one of the fundamental things I asked for was not about I want a road, I want a plane, I want any of those stuff, I said -- and I meant this -- Members want to be heard. Members want to feel relevant. When Members have issues in their ridings, they want to feel that they are being recognized, appreciated. And we hear from the government things like, we'll see what we can do, we'll see what we can work. But when I asked a question last week about maybe we should talk about an issue, we get a dismissal from the Premier saying, no, not interested. And that's not how consensus government was supposed to work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 493-20(1):
RETIREMENT OF GARY SCHAUERTE

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Good afternoon, Colleagues. Today, I am going to recognize another long serving member of the public service, Mr. Gary Schauerte. Some of you have known him as the younger brother of Doug

Schauerte, a former clerk of this House. I realize that I am not going to get everything said in the next two and half minutes about him so I'm just going to start.

Gary started his career with the GNWT way back in 1987 where he worked for the department of personnel for the summer. Following the summer job, Gary worked for the Department of Lands where he spent ten years during which time he also completed his kinesiology degree through Mount Royal College while continuing to work full-time for the GNWT.

In true Gary fashion, he had a goal to work for Municipal and Community Affairs sport and recreation division, and his pursuit of a kinesiology degree was deliberate. His hard work paid off in 1997 when, following graduation, Gary began his time with the sport and rec division. This is where I got to know him. Unfortunately, he was the new kid on the block and before you knew it, his nickname was The Rookie even though he had ten years of government experience under his belt.

After five years in the sport and recreation division as an advisor, Gary assumed the manager's role. It was in the manager role where Gary supported several projects and programs which continue to have positive impacts on the residents of the NWT. Some of these include:

Dene and Inuit Games cultural and coaching resources;

- 2019 Western Canada Lottery Act;
- 2010 Olympic and Paralympic projects; and,
- Youth Ambassador Program

Although there are many notable memories of his time in the sport and rec youth division, attending the 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympics in Vancouver as part of the Canadian Northern House was a highlight.

Through his career, the NWT proudly offered daily demonstrations of Arctic sports and Dene games which drew large crowds and long line-ups of people who wanted to enter the Canadian Northern House to watch. Shortly after returning from the Olympics, Gary started to show an interest in pursuing new opportunities and the director of corporate affairs at the time, convincing Gary to take on the manager of policy position.

Being respectful of the time, I will ask the next part of my statement be demeaned as read and print in the Hansards.

I would like to thank Laura Gareau for sharing this next part of Gary's career.

In 2012, Gary accepted the Director of Corporate Affairs position given his strong knowledge of the department's programs and services, and corporate affairs processes.

Some of MACA's successful initiatives that were supported by Gary during his time in Corporate Affairs, include:

- Amendments to legislation: The Dog Act, the Emergency Management Act, and the city, Towns and Villages Act;
- Devolution and the transfer of functions and employees to the Department of Lands; and,
- Supporting the early onset of the GNWT's response to COVID-19.

After several years working in Corporate Affairs, Gary moved to the Director Sport recreation and Youth position he was just barely in that position when Laura first started at deputy minister in May 2021 and, what did she do, but ask him to come back to the Corporate position to help with the response to the 2021 flood.

Gary has always gone the extra mile in our lengthy time working together, but I really want to thank him for the support, both professional and personal, he provided to me when I was a new DM and working on such a challenging file.

In her speech, she spoken only about some of the highlights of Gary's career. There are many, many others, including being the recipient of two Premier's Awards: One for the 2009 Youth Ambassador Program, and the second for his role on the 2011 Royal Visit Team.

She spoken a lot about Gary's work, but she spoke about Gary the person and understand the two are hard to separate. What makes Gary such a great person also made him the employee he is or was.

Gary took his job as a public servant very seriously and undertook his work with professionalism.

No matter how big or small the issue, Gary had a real passion for his work, and the work of the GNWT, and was strongly committed both to the department achieving its goals, and to the work the department does to support its clients. There is no one who was more committed to supporting the department. He was a strong defender of it, and a strong contributor to making MACA what a great department it is.

On a personal note, she spoke about the outstanding support Gary provided to her in various roles in MACA. She always knew that Gary had her back and there is no more loyal co-worker or friend to be had.

She went on to thank him for always being the first to make the team laugh to help lighten a heavy load or help make a tough situation better.

She thanked him for the example he set for her, and so many others, about how to approach the work with professionalism and commitment. As well, she thanked him for his passion, loyalty, and support for the work they did and for his many years of public service.

Like most good stories, there was always others that would say nice things about you. I would like to add Dave Earle's comments:

One thing that I think really deserves mentioning is Gary's dedication to the GNWT and MACA, his drive and desire to serve the residents of the NWT far exceeds anyone I've ever met in government. As he climbed the corporate ladder, I watched him devote countless hours in the office, weekends, evenings and to the detriment of his own personal and family time, he put his tasks with MACA first. Tina, Katie, and Matthew deserve recognition for standing by his side and supporting him through his desire to achieve excellence in the work he was so passionate about.

As a colleague, he could be difficult to work with at times, he pushed to get his decisions through and always stuck to his priorities. While he was firm in his stance on everything, the results in the end were always positive and Gary was a major part of that. He was able to see the bigger picture in ways that others couldn't.

As a supervisor Gary was incredibly supportive of all his staff, provided praise and recognition for efforts and worked through tasks as part of a team, he truly is great leader. He took great pride in organizing staff events to recognize the hard work of staff, notably the SMC Christmas breakfast where he would be up making bacon at 3am to be sure he had enough for all employees. At the end of every session, Gary would provide a lunch for all Corporate Affairs staff which he covered personally to recognise the extra effort everyone put in during the months leading up.

Gary worked for, earned and deserved every role he held as he advanced his career, and his accomplishments were nothing but exemplary. The positions Gary held have been his identity for the last 35 years, and I know there's a big

hole left in his life now that he is no longer working for MACA.

Colleagues in closing, there is not enough time to recognize his 35 years, so I am going to say: "MACA has been so lucky to have had you these past many years, so thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Colleagues, I'd like to thank Gary for his time. For the residents, he's done a great job. Thank you very much.

Members' statements. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member from Deh Cho.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 491-20(1): HOUSING NORTHWEST TERRITORIES POLICIES REGARDING EVICTIONS

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is there a policy to avoid issuing eviction orders for housing clients during the winter months? This is for the Minister of housing. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Deh Cho. Minister responsible for Housing NWT.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there is no policy to not have evictions in the winter months. The Minister or Housing NWT could consider compassionate grounds, but it depends on the circumstance. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister advise how many evictions are served during the winter months? Thank you.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That would depend year to year. Over this last year, I believe we've had ten eviction orders issued over the winter months. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Final supplementary. Member from the Deh Cho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister say how many hearings rental officers held with Deh Cho tenants in 2024-2025 before these eviction orders were issued? Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mahsi.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that number for the Member today. I can provide that information and also look it up on the rental officer site as well. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Oral questions. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake, one question.

QUESTION 492-20(1):
INUVIK BYPASS ROAD

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, it's been a day, so I'm going to lob one over the plate for my honourable colleague across the way, the Minister of Infrastructure, so she can knock it out of the park, Mr. Speaker. Will she commit to paving the Inuvik Bypass Road during the completion of the Inuvik runway expansion? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Real easy one. Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, again, I am happy to be able to report as soon as we are paving that runway, we will be chip sealing this portion of the Inuvik Bypass Road. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Members, oral questions. Inuvik Boot Lake, I guess you got your one question. You're good, right? Okay. Oral questions. Member from Slave Lake.

QUESTION 493-20(1):
DRAFT CLIMATE ACTION PLAN PUBLIC
CONSULTATION AND FEEDBACK

MS. REID: I'm not from Alberta, but thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm committed to reminding the government to listen and act accordingly on what they hear from the residents of the NWT. So during their public engagement, many thoughtful and detailed ideas were shared with Members as well as government on ECC's draft climate action plan. Most concerning to me is an overwhelming groundswell of feedback requesting clear, plain language, and direct tangible actions.

So to the Minister, I recognize that there will be a What we Heard document coming out in the near future, but can the Minister highlight at a high level what his areas of interest for changes are after reading all of the feedback. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you -- getting this right -- Member from Great Slave. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you very much to the Member for the question. As she said, there was a tremendous amount of engagement on this topic, and we extended the timeframe and continued to accept long-form submissions well into January. You know, throughout the

process, we had 128 participants at a climate change advisory group gathering. We engaged with Indigenous governments, organizations, community governments, youth, researchers, land users, industries, other partners. We had 44 residents engaged through a public engagement on the website, and two Indigenous governments and six non-government organizations also provided long-form information.

So from my personal perspective, you know, resilience, ensuring that we have proper knowledge into this process, and that we're working to provide every option that we can to assist in the target for net zero by 2050 is certainly high on the mandate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that. I'm glad he took the time to review all of that feedback. Can the Minister outline if the next iteration of the climate change action plan will take the concerns of plain language seriously, and how is the department working to address and incorporate feedback on this particular issue? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the importance of plain language was the theme of the what we heard engagement throughout. And, you know, this is very important feedback for us in that we're considering the changes and improvements to the planned climate actions. We take this responsibility to communicate with the public in a clear, concise manner that everyone can understand very seriously. And to that end, already through the engagement process we have taken some opportunities to change how we were doing things. And the department worked closely with the local graphic artists to create some broadly accessible visual presentations that were used throughout engagement. And this is just the first step of how we will make change going forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Final supplementary. Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for that. And I think graphic representations of conversations is a fantastic way to bring everybody in. But, you know, the other big theme I heard, and I know the Minister saw that, was that, you know, especially from youth, there's a lot of climate anxiety right now. So can the Minister explain what bold action he wants to see in his action plan that will address the concerns he's heard especially of our youth. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a topic that's close to my heart, ensuring that we are engaging with our youth across the NWT. I have grandchildren that are going to be coming along here into this environment soon and, you know, I'm encouraged by the participation that we had, and we had the NWT Climate Change Youth Council participate in a forum in October, Ecology North facilitated discussions, with a total of 190 students here in Yellowknife. MLA Morgan and myself are planning an engagement with high school students later in the month here in Yellowknife to discuss the issue, to listen to their concerns and their issues. And I think, you know, as a department and from my position as Minister, addressing the anxiety and the uncertainty of the changing climate with the youth in the Northwest Territories is a very high priority. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Oral questions. Member from Monfwi.

QUESTION 494-20(1):
AURORA COLLEGE COMMUNITY
LEARNING CENTRES CLOSURES

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, with the CLC closing, can the Minister commit to discussing partnership opportunities for apprenticeship and other programs with Indigenous government and community organizations to strengthen the presence of Aurora College in small communities? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that meeting with Indigenous governments is something that Cabinet does often, and education always shows up on the agendas for those meetings. In addition, I meet with the development corporations that are associated with our Indigenous governments and have met with the Tlicho Investment Corporation just recently as well and are having conversations about this very thing. I'm doing those conversations in my role as Minister of education, not through Aurora College, but certainly would want to invite the Member to work with the college to invite them into the community as well and to encourage those conversations to continue. So ultimately, Mr. Speaker, my answer is yes, from the perspective of Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Masi, Mr. Speaker. Community learning centres are currently staffed by full-time community adult educators as well as visiting instructors. Can the Minister explain what will happen to these jobs once the centres close? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Aurora College is currently working with the Department of Finance to help affected employees work through the staffing process and work through what comes next for them, including looking at lists of available positions within the GNWT. So I can confirm that Aurora College is working closely with the Department of Finance on this. Thank you.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Masi, Mr. Speaker. Seven CLCs share space in GNWT owned or community facilities. For example, there is no formal lease agreement between Mezi Community School in Whati and Aurora College. Can the Minister explain what will happen to these spaces in June? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can't comment on what is going to happen exactly with each one of those spaces right now. But I think it's important that we're creative and flexible in what this looks like going forward. Where there are facilities that are leased by the GNWT, those facilities would go back to the owner, and where the infrastructure is owned by the GNWT, I can say that there has already been outreach by either NGOs within communities or some Indigenous governments who have said, hey, we have a different thing that we would like to see that community learning centre used for. And so I think it's really important to hear communities out and to work with Indigenous governments and also work through the Department of Infrastructure's asset management policies of what happens to assets when they're no longer used by the GNWT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 495-20(1):
PUBLICATION OF NORTRAN PROGRAM

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today my question is a follow-up on the options available for approaching funding to challenge trades and the demands in our workforce. My question is to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

Can the Minister agree to the publication of NORTRAN as I referenced in previous correspondence and in my statement? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if the Member's asking for the publication of it, I think that tabling it here in the House is a great way to make sure that all of our colleagues can see it and the Member can share his hard work on that. And I look forward to continuing conversations about NORTRAN with the Member. Thank you.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to bring to the attention of the Minister during my lobby efforts, we, the Sahtu, have secured a contribution of \$7,000 from industry for the publication.

My next question is, can the Minister share what supports are in place for this training readiness publication supports in terms of funding, etcetera? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I spoke to yesterday about the different training opportunities that ECE does have, there are supports for businesses who are -- or employers, rather, and also Indigenous governments and community organizations, that would like to deliver training and on-the-job supports for staff. There's also wage subsidies that are available to staff as well. And certainly through a program like this, those subsidies would still be available as well. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister for Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the Minister for that information here. That all goes towards what supports are behind this plan.

Can the Minister in consultation with Cabinet colleagues for the federal engagement ask or rely on whether there's a joint initiative that can be supported by this government for the federal ownership of accessing and redirecting resource revenues from the Norman Wells oil field towards NORTRAN. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I believe in the Member's statement he referenced legacy royalties from the site. The GNWT certainly would not be in a position to ask for those back.

And then in -- however, Indigenous governments certainly could have their own conservations and bilaterals with the federal government.

In terms of federal engagement, certainly the government does have a federal engagement strategy and has identified key infrastructure projects as of what they are going to the federal government and advocating for. When it comes to our FTP tables, our federal, territorial, provincial tables that we all sit at as Ministers, we certainly work with our province and territorial colleagues in order to advocate for additional funding and advocating for additional labour market funding is something that I do on a regular basis. So in that respect, yes. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

QUESTION 496-20(1):
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED
NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS
OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as mentioned earlier, in the 19th Assembly we worked on Bill 85, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Implementation Act. We spent a lot of time on it. We came up with a report, and we submitted it in the House. However, Mr. Speaker, right after it was implemented, the NWT Council of Leaders, through a memorandum of understanding, put forward an agreement that was signed by those Aboriginal governments.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask the question to the Deputy Premier, can you let the House know on what's happening with the United Nation UNDRIP document with Indigenous governments. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Madam Deputy Premier.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there is an action plan that is underway. I understand that there is a target date of the fall of 2025 to have that action plan published and that work towards that is, indeed, on track. Departments are all contributing to it, working with participating Indigenous governments toward that. Thank you.

MR. EDJERICON: Jeez, you took my next question away. Now that you just announced that it's going to be released in 2025, this plan, how is it going to roll out? Is this working with

Indigenous governments; can you just update the House on this. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't want to presuppose the work of the committee with respect to how the action plan is being formed and what it will contain or its detail. There is a lot of work happening across departments. We are all contributing to being part of the work on behalf of the GNWT as being just one Member at that table. So, Mr. Speaker, and I don't want to also -- to take away from the fact that the GNWT has bilateral agreements with multiple Indigenous governments and that we also sit at Council of Leaders and at IGCS. So there's a great deal of integration within the Northwest Territories between this government and that of Indigenous governments, and we'll certainly continue to see that as it goes forward, both this as well as then looking forward to see what the action plan ultimately contains. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Madam Deputy Premier. Final supplementary. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in the 2025-2026 Budget, I went through it and I'd just like to know what the Deputy Premier has planned to implement UNDRIP when there's -- I didn't see no money in the budget. Can she explain as to how we're going to move forward. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the work of implementing and respecting UNDRIP and treaties is part of the day-to-day work that happens across every department and is the responsibility of every single Minister at all times. Mr. Speaker, there doesn't need to be a new line item or new money to be reflective of the honour and the oath that we've all taken, nor of the role of every government or every department vis-a-vis each community and each Indigenous government.

And, Mr. Speaker, the example I'll give is, frankly, the work of the GNWT on the action committee in order to see that we are delivering on 2025 as being the action plan. That work is happening with budgets that are proposed for Executive and Indigenous affairs as the lead but also with every other department that they have folks and staff available to contribute to it. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Deputy Premier. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 497-20(1):
IMPROVING NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
HEALTHCARE CARDS

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's probably rare I get to make a statement like this. I'm sure we will all agree in this House that health care dollars are precious. It's very difficult to find agreement on anything some days, but I think we might be able to agree on that.

Mr. Speaker, the questions I'll be raising today are to the health care Minister, clearly, regarding the security of health care cards. And that's always been something of interest of mine because if I recall during one of my previous assemblies, we had more health care cards out there than citizens. What an interesting paradox it was at that time.

So, Mr. Speaker, my question specific to the Minister of health is, is she aware of how many health care cards we have out there, and does that number relate to the number of citizens we have in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question. You know, my very first job after high school was a health care card registration specialist, and one of the things my colleague taught me was is that we have very -- we have a lot of people that we're doing, we have to be doing investigations on that are outside of the territory. So that probably speaks to the time when the Member was in the House, that we started to change the way that we provide health care cards. And now they actually have an expiry date. So when you renew your health care card, you have to have an NWT address. Before they never had expiry dates. But I do not have the detail of how many people that we have as residents right now offhand and how many cards we have out there, but I am sure that I can get that data for the Member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll take the Minister on their offer of how we know and how we know.

So, Mr. Speaker, other jurisdictions place health care dollars so high on their list, they actually make health care cards also an identity card. So in other words, their picture's on their health care card. And places such as Ontario, BC, and Quebec do this to ensure the quality of the health care is going to the right people. They can guarantee the number with the person. So, Mr. Speaker, my specific question

is this: Is this an initiative that the department of health can take on to, again, protect the precious northern health care dollars? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and it's -- you know, I find that question -- it was just a couple of weeks ago that I was having this conversation because renewal is up this year for health care cards. And on our health care cards, they are very plain. They have an expiry date and they have our name. And so that was the question that I asked my staff, to go back to the department to say how do we work with infrastructure? You know, we have this struggle right now in our communities where a lot of people are looking for identification cards. How do we work together to provide identification cards, have that information, the picture so it's the right person with the card so that, I've just tasked my staff to kind of look at options on where we are with all that kind of information and is that something that we can do and what is that cost going to cost us. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Well, it's funny because I get -- what's the right phrase -- I don't want to say targeted, but I get target -- I'll say it anyway. I get targeted for not giving my questions to the Minister or advancing this up, but yet she scooped my last question. So good on her for being on her toes, Mr. Speaker, instead of heels.

Mr. Speaker, that said, I just want to reaffirm, with the contract coming up, will she ensure that Members are involved in some type of early discussion and will she commit to this contract we are going to do health care card business differently and more improved? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to clarify, I think it's the renewals that are up right now for Northwest Territories residents to make sure that they're applying within a couple of months of their health care card. I'd have to look into how or who is the procurement of how we do our health care cards. But that is all kind of the questions that I have just started to have because I think it's important that if we're doing this in the Northwest Territories, then we need to be making sure that those cards, everybody in our territory has one. Maybe having their picture on it, maybe it being their personal identification for flying, all that type of stuff, it would be a good thing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife North.

QUESTION 498-20(1):
STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP PROJECT
LEASES

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Infrastructure.

So the Office of the Auditor General in its audit of the Stanton P3 project recommended the GNWT publicly report costs related to the Legacy Hospital Building leasing arrangement and to provide updates to total project costs when there are significant changes over the 30-year term. Now, the GNWT has disagreed and declined to publicly report those costs.

Can the Minister explain who or what the government is protecting by refusing to publicly report these costs? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Minister of Finance -- or Infrastructure.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Either way, Mr. Speaker, on this one, thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, this report from the auditor general, every single other recommendation the GNWT has accepted. It's singularly around the classification of the Liwego'ati Building as being whether a P3 or not a P3 that we continue to have this issue. If it is a commercial lease, we do not report any of our commercial leases publicly. They are proprietary information to the landlord. Because we have classified this one as a commercial lease, it is proprietary information, it is reported by constituency, by community, as every other commercial lease is. This one is no different. There's no matter of any -- then when people are being protected, Mr. Speaker, it's the same as on every other commercial lease. We don't report them publicly. They are not part of the P3 reporting. They are held separate. But on every other aspect of the audit, we were more than happy to accept the recommendations. And, quite frankly, we're already making the changes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the Minister's claiming this is a case just like any other commercial lease. Does the GNWT hold any other commercial leases where we actually own the building and we've leased it to someone and then subleased it back from them? Is there any other cases of any other building or any other commercial lease that

works that way in the territory? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge this is a unique situation. It was also a unique opportunity, Mr. Speaker. It's not one that was -- any Member of this Cabinet was in government at the time. What we had is a building that we owned that needed to be remediated, and we needed to remediate it at significant costs. This is a large building, a medical building, and the remediation would be significant. So that was included as part of the leasing arrangement.

Subsequent to that -- and I think this is where there starts to be some challenges. And subsequent to that, it was identified that we would, in fact, need space for long-term care. And so instead, we already had the cost sharing or the agreement -- revenue sharing agreement in place. With that revenue sharing agreement in place, Mr. Speaker, we were able to go into the Liwego'ati Building, go back to the commercial party, negotiate a lease with them, with our revenue sharing agreement in place we got a better deal as a result of that, and that's the situation we find ourselves in. That's a fairly unique circumstance as compared to any other lease in the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the Minister has just claimed that subsequent to the lease, we realized -- or the government realized that it needed more space for health care services but, in fact, it was as early as 2014 that the government had recognized that more space was needed for health care services. Can the Minister explain why that was not taken into account when this lease agreement was first arranged with Ventura? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this, again -- more than happy to say if we want to admit wrongdoing, that looking back ten years ago we don't have all of the records that we should have in order to explain that decision. None of us were here. I wasn't here.

What I can say, Mr. Speaker, to the best of the knowledge today, at the time in 2014, the plan that health and social services was to build a new and standalone long-term care facility, and then when that project would have been ready to move forward closer, if I recall correctly, to the 2019, 2020 -- or rather 2020, the situation

had changed, the markets had changed, commercial realities had changed, and costs had gone up significantly for new builds and at that time -- I believe it was at that time that the decision was made to, in fact, reutilize this building where we already a revenue sharing agreement rather than going and building new.

So, Mr. Speaker, if we want to now -- and, again, one of the recommendations was to keep better records. Agreed, and we'll do that going forward. But in this case, that's the history that brought us here. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 499-20(1):
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES EARLY
LEARNING AND CHILDCARE AGREEMENT

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this question is -- these questions are for the Minister of ECE.

Mr. Speaker, I've been speaking with daycare operators. The wage certification grid that the government has brought out is causing difficulties for operators in a time when we're trying to expand daycare spaces. Mr. Speaker, is this new grid something that's been imposed on us by the federal government, or is it our own program? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the Canada-wide agreement with the GNWT solely dictates that we must have a wage grid, but it doesn't say where that wage grid starts and where it ends. That is solely dictated by our pocketbooks. Thank you.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that clarification. So, Mr. Speaker, daycare operators are telling me that this new system is restrictive and preventing them from hiring staff and helping the department achieve their goal of creating new daycare spaces. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister commit to sit down with these operators and work with them and figure this out, find a solution that works for them, that works for the department, something that can help us move forward? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my last -- I know which early learning and childcare institution the Member is speaking with. My last

conversation with the executive director of that institution, I did say any time you want to have a sit down I am more than happy. I can also inform the Member that there's been three separate meetings since last Friday with this particular childcare provider, and I believe there was even one as recently as today, Mr. Speaker. I'm always happy to sit down and have these conversations, but I will also say that we have to ensure that our program falls in line with the federal agreement and while we stipulate the minimum that people need to be paid, providers are more than welcome to exceed that. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm glad the Minister highlighted that because that dovetails well with the question I was about to ask.

Mr. Speaker, operators are telling us that they can't charge fees for additional services like providing healthy meals, extracurricular programming, or even making up the gap between what the government is willing to give and what daycare operators need to be paying in order to keep staff. So, again, is that a rule being imposed on us by the feds or the GNWT, and can we change these things that are creating problems for operators?

Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind the Minister, as she's well aware, we are trying to increase spaces; we want our operators to be given the tools they need to increase spaces to expand. So can the Minister commit to working with them to change the things that need to be changed to solve these problems? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too would like the same things as the Member. The stipulation of no additional fees being charged is in the Canada-wide agreement and any additional fees that are charged must be deducted by the primary fees that are being charged to the parents. So we are in a situation where we need to figure out how to create sustainability and stability within our own system but ensure that we are, at the end of the day, following that agreement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 500-20(1):
STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to follow up on questions raised by the Member for Yellowknife North on the Stanton renewal project.

The auditor general maintains that the leasing -- the decision to lease the Legacy Building, it's not good value for money. Plain English. It's in excess of \$70 million that wasn't part of the initial project to a building we own. Does the Minister agree with the auditor general, and can she tell us today that this was not good value for money as a decision? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Range Lake. Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the auditor general, as I understand, was -- is looking at the two projects as one and our view continues to be that the two projects are not one. And so the way that we are looking at that value analysis continues to differ, Mr. Speaker. And we do now have a campus-based approach with health care with the two facilities operating side-by-side rather than a Stanton Territorial Hospital and what would have then been a separate building built somewhere else at some distance. So at this point, Mr. Speaker, we have two operating facilities and, again, looking at them as the two separate projects, it is our view that they are, indeed, a good value for money. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, I guess I'm confused. This seems to be new information. Was there ever a plan that Liwego'ati would not be used or that Stanton Legacy would not be used as part of a health care campus? My understanding is there was always a component of that in the initial RFP that went out for the rebuild was to demo this building for other uses and that was -- so was there some other purpose intended for Stanton Legacy before it became the Liwego'ati Building? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, when the decision was made to lease it out and to have it remediated by that leaseholder, the intention was that the leaseholder could make whatever choices initially that they wanted about what they would do with that building. Likely office space, commercial, commercial space, but not bound necessarily to turn it back into any kind of health facility. That would, of course, require the health department to be

planning to go back in there and initially that was not the plan. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I know for a fact that the clause or the arrangement with the P3 partner is very specific that the GNWT gets final say about what goes in there. We had jokes about, you know, it not being allowed to be a casino, for example. So the GNWT had a say over it. They could have made it clear that it needs to be health. But I'll say this: Can the Minister produce any evidence that this is actually saving money -- that this -- at the time, it is saving money competitively from leases? We've heard as much as 30 percent savings but there's no dollar figure. Can she produce a receipt? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, so there's the P3 partner who operates the Stanton Territorial Hospital and then there is a separate arrangement, commercial arrangement, with a leaseholder over the Liwego'ati Building. Again, two different entities that we are speaking about. And what I certainly can look again back to, and I believe was committed at the time, is that some further evidence can be provided, some further information can be provided with respect to the cost differentials. So specifically on the Liwego'ati Building, at that time it would have been -- at the time that the decision was made to lease back the room and the spaces that were being remediated, given the revenue sharing agreement that was in place, it was better value for dollar than to go out then and build a new building for the long-term care facility.

Mr. Speaker, there's -- again, we acknowledge that records back from 2014 and 2015 are not as complete as they should be, that that recordkeeping and that decision-making wasn't as good as it -- in terms of records, wasn't as good as it should be, and that is the situation we find ourselves in now. Not going to do that going forward, and we have a lot better checks and balances in place. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 501-20(1):
AURORA COLLEGE POLYTECHNIC
TRANSITION

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm full of compliments today; here's one to Aurora College.

I went to their website recently, and I don't know if it's in response to my earlier questions several months ago or in the sense they were doing it anyway and just decided to do it better, I like what they've done with the timelines and the progress tracker on the work being done for the polytech.

Mr. Speaker, that being said -- not a criticism, just an observation. Mr. Speaker, on its website, it points out that they have a lot of things outstanding even though it shows it looks like they should been done or should be in the progress of doing, such as recruitment of marketing communication strategy development, release a polytech university five-year academic plan, and the last one is establish a new legislation -- establish new legislation for polytechnic university.

Mr. Speaker, all of these things look like they should have been started. I'm asking is this initiative still live, or is there some concerns that we need to know that there are delays that need to come to light to the public? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am sure Aurora College staff will be happy to hear the Member's compliments in regards to new legislation. That is certainly something that needs to be worked on in the life of this Assembly. And as the Member knows, Members have received an embargoed copy of the new mandate agreement which does have an implementation plan in it and that will be released publicly tomorrow -- later this week. Later this week. I don't -- yes, later this week. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, maybe to help the Minister, the old Minister used to say in the fullness of time, which if you were paying attention, that could mean any time. So needless to say, please don't use that further proof of what's happening.

Mr. Speaker, establishment of new legislation for a polytech university is the cornerstone of where it's going, defines it, and everything then comes out of it. In other words, its budgets, its plans, its mandate, etcetera, etcetera. It needs legislation to be real.

Mr. Speaker, when -- sorry, on the website, it says it will be released for completion obviously -- thank you, Mr.

Speaker -- March 2025. Can the Minister update us on this initiative? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that new legislation will not be released in March of 2025. It still needs -- it's GNWT legislation so it still needs to go through GNWT protocols. It will be tabled in the House here and then will go to standing committee as per our usual protocols. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And for the record, I appreciate your guidance. Mr. Speaker, my question is when can Members expect this draft legislation to come forward for review? Again, I can't stress enough, nothing can really happen without it hence we're waiting and want to ensure that the process is moving forward.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when that legislation does take place, it creates much more separation between the government and Aurora College. I can assure the Member that work to lead us to that point is still happening. We are still going through the process of accreditation. We are still -- Aurora College is still working on its program development, is still working on its policies. They're still very much working towards all of these pieces that will lead to Polytechnic University Act, but there's a lot to be done between now and then, including accreditation, and other pieces that go along with it like their new college funding formula that will also be part of that. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 502-20(1):
STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will continue having questions for the Minister of Infrastructure following up to my last set.

So given that the whole point of leasing the Legacy Hospital Building to Ventura was to transfer risk to Ventura, has the government been able to recover any of the costs related to the plumbing problems that were encountered just as the building was supposed to open last year? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't have that specific information. I'd be happy to get that for the Member and provide it to the House. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we are locked in to paying \$78 million over 30 years to Ventura, can the Minister explain whether there is any benefit or value that Ventura is providing to the government over the next 30 years by holding the lease; what are we getting from that arrangement? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one of the most significant things that we get from that, having entered into the revenue, again, sharing agreement with them, it did bring down the overall cost to us of having access to a building that has been fully renovated for use. And when I say renovated, I also want to say remediated. Again, the costs of remediating a building of this size and scale are not insignificant. That would have been a significant cost to the GNWT to do that, to bring it up to a level that would then be actually useable again from the state that it was in. So we are -- that was -- that is the single biggest asset -- or benefit that we are getting. And now as the sort of landlord, if you will, they do have an obligation to maintain the building to a standard. So that's another specialized service that they are providing as a major land -- a major rent -- landlord holder, that they brought it up to scale and are now having to support us, otherwise we'd have to bring on likely more public servants and more specialized care in order to maintain the building ourselves. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And it's my understanding that -- well, that -- I mean, the remediation work is done and the GNWT, in fact, had to pay for all of the renovations to get the building ready so I'm not sure what they're continuing to offer. But is the department investigating the potential and the possible risks and benefits of breaking that 30-year lease agreement with Ventura for the Legacy Hospital Building? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I do think that's an important point for folks to understand that there was the remediation of the space, first of all, and there's an industry term for it that's escaping me, but essentially to have it into a shell position so that it could actually be then renovated. So that's where there's two parts to

what's going on. And the -- the vanilla shell, I think is the term. To have it at a vanilla shell so that it could be turned into a useful space. Again, that's not an insignificant cost and that has now been parsed out over the course of the lease which, again, spreads that cost out over time rather than requiring a significant upfront amount.

And as for the second question within the third question, Mr. Speaker, it's not my understanding and not my recollection that we are doing any kind of investigation of breaking that lease. That's not generally the kind of contractual party that we want to be seen as a government and so, again, it's certainly not my understanding that there's any intent to do that this time. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Oral questions. Member from Great Slave.

QUESTION 503-20(1):
STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL
PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have some questions for the Minister of Infrastructure as well. So when she says things that the records are not as good as they could have been in 2014, 2015, my archivist heart comes out and I go oh dear. So, fundamentally, that is a huge red flag for someone who understands how the government keeps records. So we have records disposition authorities within every department, including her department, including back in 2014, 2015, Mr. Speaker. And so my question is how are we not keeping records that we are bound to by law? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Great Slave. Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, it strikes fear into my heart as a lawyer who is under obligations to hold records as well. So I can't answer for what may or may not have happened back in 2014 or 2015, Mr. Speaker. What I can answer for is the efforts that we're making today to make sure that we don't find ourselves back in this situation. Not only today but looking back even a few years now within this -- within more recent government, changes to the procurement process, changes to the records management. We have a procurement committee. It might seem like an extra layer, but to not have coordination amongst procurement shared services, infrastructure, and the departments that are being serviced by them, makes it far too easy for things to be missed and to not be properly tracked. There's changes

in the capital planning process to better provide information about long-term costs associated with a project.

There's a single place where procurement now lives, both a dashboard that is publicly available, and, again, within the Office of the Comptroller General which is our counterpart to the auditor general's office.

Between all of those things, and likely more that I've missed, and it's supposed to be a short answer, Mr. Speaker, I am satisfied that we've made a lot of change, and we'll continue to look for opportunities to do that. Thank you.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, you know, it's already at the barn door, you can't close it in the past; I understand that. So what sort of forensic audit did the department do to try and seek out those records and indeed how did they cooperate with the OAG? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the work between, I believe -- well, multiple departments and the auditor's general office of Canada went on for I want to say two years. It might have been slightly longer than that. That's fairly extensive, and I'd be happy to perhaps provide that by way of a written response. I won't do it justice here. The Department of Finance and the Office of the Comptroller General works with the Auditor General's Office of Canada on an annual basis. They prepare all of the audits for our government. And so, again, I think there was two parts to the question, and I'm thinking I'm missing the second half. But, again, in short, Mr. Speaker, happy to commit that we will provide some detail on the extent of the work that went on and the extent of the collaboration we had with the auditor general's office. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 504-20(1):
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES EARLY
LEARNING AND CHILDCARE AGREEMENT

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to continue on the line of questioning and dig a little deeper with the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

Mr. Speaker, I had asked about the possibility of daycares charging fees in order to make up the gap. Is there perhaps a loophole that could be found in that daycares would not be charging fees for providing daycare but simply for

charging -- for extras, things like providing meals, things like extracurricular activities that I know parents love having for their children. So is there some way that we can find a way around the rules that are being put on us by the feds? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, from the agreement that we as provinces and territories have with the federal government for childcare, we aren't allowed to charge additional fees. The piece that keeps coming back out is places can do fundraising. I do understand, though, Mr. Speaker, as a working parent myself who uses different entities to care for my children, that this is very difficult to do. We also know that many sporting institutions do charge fundraising fees if parents aren't able to do fundraising. And so in answer to the Member's question, I am currently looking into what loopholes might exist. Thank you.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that answer. That does, I think, provide somewhat of a path. I mean, fundraising is something that they could be doing in order to do these extra programs, so that's something I can bring back to them as an option and I hope the Minister -- but to get to the next question, Mr. Speaker, if charging fees isn't allowed, I'm looking at what can we do to change this gap -- to close this gap as MLAs. I know that my colleagues probably join me in wanting to do what we can for the daycares, do what we can to help them expand, help them operate to the best of their extent, so what -- does the Minister have any ideas for what we can do on the territorial side to help these operators? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what I'm hearing from operators, and from Members on the floor of this House, is that they're looking to pay their staff more, and they're in a situation where they are provided a certain amount from Education, Culture and Employment in order to do that, and Education, Culture and Employment can only cover a certain amount of that based on our budgets. What I can say is the bulk of increases to the early learning and childcare budgets for the Department of education have been from this program and even right across the department, Mr. Speaker. And so we, for our current funding, are certainly tapped out. The Members did negotiate an additional \$3.5 million in our previous budget negotiations, which was a huge help. But what we are continuing to hear is that that is not

enough. We know that across the country that jurisdictions are having to put more and more money into this program. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplementary. Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, certainly I'm interested in hearing back from the Minister what they need to help make a difference, and I can advocate on this side with my colleagues to see if we can get that done.

Mr. Speaker, considering the problems that this new program is causing, and I'm hearing it from many of my constituents, and I'm sure it's happening across the country, can the Minister work with her colleagues in the provinces to advocate to the federal government for better flexibility for implementation of this program seeing the issues that we've been seeing, knowing that it's not really working as well as it was intended, can the Minister advocate for changes at the federal level so that we don't have as many roadblocks in front of our operators? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can share with the Member that since I started in this role, one of the common things heard at our FTP table is that this agreement -- or these agreements were signed before record inflation occurred and that, as I had previously said, jurisdictions are putting more and more money into this program in order to make it work. So that is something that I will certainly continue to share with the federal government at every opportunity that I do get at these tables what the reality is that we are hearing from our childcare providers. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 505-20(1): INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT POLICY

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has announced that there are new changes to the Indigenous employment -- or Indigenous recruitment policy -- thank you -- which replaces the affirmative action policy. We're going to be bringing back P1s essentially and allow Indigenous Northerners to have priority status. Before that wasn't possible because of the Constitution. Has the Constitution changed? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: No, the Constitution hasn't changed, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, then how has the government derisked this issue? It was unconstitutional before, that was the concern that changed the policy, now the policy remains the same, at least for one class of individuals. Can the Minister explain why that decision was made?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is the issue of residency that creates the risk that we would be concerned with respect to the mobility rights under the Constitution, so section 6 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms provide that all Canadian residents have mobility rights. And so it is specifically with respect to saying that persons who are living in the North or have lived in the North or have lived here for some period of time, that classification is the concern. But membership in a group that is historically disadvantaged, so this is where Indigenous Canadians and Indigenous Canadians who are Inuit, First Nation, Metis members particularly from a group within the Northwest Territories, that group membership can still be one that is, under section 15 of the Charter, allowed to have an ameliorative program; in other words, preferential hiring. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the change and support it, just to be clear, but, Mr. Speaker, there are other people of groups that are similarly disadvantaged or similarly of minority status, including people with disabilities. The disabilities council has come out and made it clear that they do not think this is a good move to make for the community. So why can we not include other protected minority groups under the Constitution in the affirmative action policy -- or in the priority action policy? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes, I agree, an excellent question and appreciate it, Mr. Speaker, and there will be divergence of views on this. I recognize that. It is an area that when we did engagement over a year and some, 2023-2024, it's an area that I, frankly, found interesting to read and learn more about. There is, again, divergence of view on it. But one of the views that the Department of Finance has here ultimately adopted is that folks who may experience some form of disability don't want to have to self-disclose in order to be able to gain

advantage, and so what we would like to be in a position, under the diversity and inclusion framework, is to say firstly that there is an opportunity for recruitment and for staffing officers to positively provide accommodations to someone rather than wait for the person to have to self-identify and as such, we can create a workplace where people are naturally accommodated from the moment of applying through to their work time, and they can do that through the duty to accommodate and through the diversity and inclusion framework rather than relying on having them to have to self-identify to participate in affirmative action type program. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 506-20(1):
STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
NORTHERN BONUS DISCONTINUATION

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We found out with great shock there last year that the northern bonus program was cut in the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. It was embedded into the deepest of the budget details and I, like many members, didn't realize it had been done until after the fact. My question for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment is simply this: What type of analysis had justified that choice to eliminate that program that is very near and dear to many of our returning students here to the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as Cabinet, the financial management board, we looked at all programs from -- well, not all, sorry -- most programs from our departments that were not legislated or afforded through federal funding, and we evaluated what we could redirect for -- because we have a lot of spending happening in our health program, and we know from Members on the floor of this House, and even from our own constituencies, that health care is very important to residents of the Northwest Territories, and we desperately wanted to see more funding redirected to that sector. So we went through different funds, and we evaluated different programs within our departments and found that the reason that this program was instituted within Education, Culture and Employment was to try and encourage more graduates to return to the NWT, and it was not increasing the number of

graduates that were returning to the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, the Minister said something probably where I was going next at the end of her last answer which was believing that it did not increase the return. Would the Minister, in a response to my previous question, be willing to table that analysis before the House; in other words, as a return to the oral questions or whatever function she wishes to desire, also with the analysis of is it actually playing out as initially planned? So in other words, have they reviewed and studied the initial decision? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if the Member would like me to share with him the number of students that were returning when the program started versus last year, more than happy to do that. As far as reviewing a program that just ended, Mr. Speaker, we haven't really had space or time to see impacts of that. What is occurring here is now students who have repayable loans need to repay those loans, and students who have remissible loans are being asked to stay in the North longer in order to remiss those. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a number of constituents who are quite upset about this. As a matter of fact I even have a few of her constituents asking can we bring this back. If the Minister will table this information, I'd appreciate that. If she feels she can only send it to me, well, I'll take that too.

Mr. Speaker, I'm asking when -- often when we cut a program, we'll say we'll do an analysis after the fact, like extended health benefits, we heard that promise. Would the Minister be doing any type of 360 analysis after the fact to assess the impacts and choices made by the department? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Mr. Speaker, I'm more than happy to discuss this with the Member if the program isn't there. I would like to understand what the Member is looking to understand. If he wants me to table numbers of students who come home after they complete graduation in order to see how those change over time, more than happy to share that information with this House. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Colleagues, our time is up. Oral questions. Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm requesting, Mr. Speaker, if we can go back to point number 5, recognition of visitors in the gallery on the orders of the day paper. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. He's asking unanimous consent to go back to orders of the day, point number 5, recognition of visitors in the gallery. Any nays? Seeing no nays. Member from the Sahtu.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery (Reversion)

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, colleagues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to acknowledge my cousin Wilbert Cook's son, Tyrell Cook-Gargan, as the page for the Assembly. Welcome to the Assembly. Good to see the young people participating into the hearings.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills. Reports of Standing and Special Committees. Tabling of documents. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 289-20(1);
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES RESPONSE TO COMMITTEE
REPORT 9-20(1): REPORT ON THE REVIEW
OF BILL 8: AN ACT TO AMEND THE
STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE ACT

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 9-20(1), Report on the Review of Bill 8: An Act to Amend the Student Financial Assistance Act. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Tabling of documents. Member from Great Slave.

TABLED DOCUMENT 290-20(1):
LETTER FROM NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES FAMILY VIOLENCE
SHELTER NETWORK REGARDING
BUILDING SHELTER CAPACITY FUNDING

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table a letter I received from the Northwest Territories Family Violence

Shelter Network seeking reinstatement of annual Building Shelter Capacity Funding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Tabling of documents. Motions. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills. First Reading of Bills. Second Reading of Bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, Tabled Document 275-20(1), with the Member from the Deh Cho in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): I now call the Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of the committee? Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair. The committee wishes to consider Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates, Health and Social Services. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, committee. We will take a short recess and resume with the first item. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Committee, I now call the Committee of the Whole to order. We have decided to -- we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 275-20(1), Main Estimates 2025-2026. We will now consider the Department of Health and Social Services. Does the Minister of Health and Social Services wish to bring witnesses into the House?

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes, I do.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses into the chamber.

Would the Minister please introduce her witnesses.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. To my left is the deputy minister Jo-Anne Cecchetto. And to my left -- or my right, my

other left -- to my right is Jeannie Mathison, ADM finance.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): The committee has agreed to forego general comments. Does the committee agree to proceed to the detail contained in the tabled document?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Committee, we will defer the departmental summary and review the estimates by activity summary beginning with administrative and support services starting on page 199 with information items on page 202. Are there any questions?

We're on administrative and support services starting on page 199 with information items on page 202. Are there any questions? No further questions -- oh, sorry. Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I'm sorry, I have a lot of paper here, please forgive me. So my question is can -- I think underneath this function is listed information services on page 199. So my question would be, to the Minister, if she can provide a status update on the electronic medical records program, what the timeline for completion is. And I'll stop there and follow up with the rest of my time. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Minister Semmler.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I believe the electronic medical records would be under capital as it is an infrastructure project.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Minister. Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, I guess I'm thinking about it more from the business plan perspective which is where it's listed, so I was wondering if you could just give the House an update on that project even though it -- yes, it would be, I guess, in capital. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. As I wasn't prepared to speak to that piece, I'm going to just turn it over to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Cecchetto.

MS. JO-ANNE CECCHETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for the question. Just of a reminder to folks, the electronic health record is a multicomponent to that -- there's about seventy components within that initiative in and of itself. What I can say is that over this calendar year for 2025 is the plan for procurement, and our hope is that we are doing the implementation, for example, of the electronic medical record over a phased approach, and we will begin that work in the start of the calendar of 2026.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, deputy Cecchetto. Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, just wanted to have that info out in the public as it is a question I get. Thank you. Nothing further.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Madam Chair. So the changes here seem to be all related to forced growth. \$4 million for ratification of the UNW agreement, \$3 million for medical travel funding within NTHSSA. So is that kind of -- etcetera; is that an accurate description of the additional spending under this activity? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister Semmler.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes, that is correct.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. So when we have things like labour market supplements or anything that falls kind of outside of collective agreement but represents additional pay or for nursing or incentives for nursing or doctors or any medical professionals, is that this activity as well; would they cover that? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member for Range Lake. Minister Semmler.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes, that's correct. So anything that's negotiated for the staff, if in the collective agreement, if it's in our department then that's where it would lie. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Minister. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. So is the department -- I don't see anything clearly identified along those lines, but is the department considering additional benefits or labour market supplements to support the recruitment and retention efforts within the health authority? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member. Minister Semmler.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, as the negotiations go through the collective agreement bargaining, we follow whatever the agreement is after that, you know -- we cannot bargain additionally outside that collective agreement. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Madam Chair. My understanding was during the pandemic in particular but additional benefit -- or wage subsidies -- the labour market supplement in actual fact were negotiated to help support frontline workers. And that process occurred outside of the collective agreement, is that accurate? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the labour market supplement that was negotiated at the time, this current negotiation that they -- there was pieces added as part of that negotiation, and that is now where 17 additional health and social services positions were added to the list of those eligible for labour market supplements along with the existing nurse practitioner, registered nurse, midwives, licensed practical nurses, and medical laboratory technologists. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Okay, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just -- I'm trying to get at if we're trying to find more ways to support that -- those incentives because the retention and recruitment numbers are very -- well, the retention numbers are very poor, and even it seems when we recruit nurses, in particular -- because there is a dedicated unit to do that -- they're out the door as soon as we get them in. So if the department isn't considering additional financial incentives, what is its strategy to work on recruitment and retention let's say around nurses working with the health recruitment unit and finance? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member for Range Lake. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I wanted to also mention as part of that labour market supplement there were eligible positions that were increased for retention in that labour market supplement. But

as for what the department is doing or what -- within NTHSSA is there is the recruitment strategy that the department is working along with. And I can turn that over to the deputy minister to go through some of the things that are going on. And the thing to be reminded is these are things that cannot be monetary, so in cash or the -- as the labour market supplement is, and so it's ways to try to enhance making this a better place to come and work. So I'll turn that over to the deputy minister if that's okay with you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Minister of health. Deputy minister Cecchetto.

MS. JO-ANNE CECCHETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair. You may recall that our current recruitment health human resource strategy expired in this last March of 31st in 2024. We are in the process of creating what we call a people strategy. It is due to be delivered for June of 2025. This will include strategies, activities, related to recruitment and retention. So, for example, the health authorities are doing what we call exit and entry surveys. So using that information to be able to inform that strategy. They're completing quarterly reviews of current positions, how those positions are budgeted as an example. They're looking at pieces around providing guidelines for staff, looking at bursary programs, looking at opportunities to bring our youth into health and social services, and then, of course, looking at enhancing what we would consider to be our attraction and recruitment strategy. So you may recall that we had a friends and family travel program, looking to continue that work. We had a referral program whereby folks who in the GNWT referred anybody into our system, looking at encouraging those strategies to continue as well. So those are just a few examples of the items that we will continue to work on to help recruit and also retain our existing workforce.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, deputy minister Cecchetto. Member for Range Lake, do you have any? Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, has the department consulted with frontline health care workers and -- other frontline health care workers, practitioners, on this people strategy that's due this June? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member for Range Lake. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, that is correct that there is -- they are consulting with frontline staff and,

you know, and as one of the things that I would encourage and I would commit to even bringing that back to making sure that is still -- that that's being carried out. So thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Minister of health. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that coming from the Minister. Can the Minister share the engagement schedule with me and any other pertinent details around these consultations with staff. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member for Range Lake. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. As I mentioned, I would follow up back with NTHSSA, and I will follow up to see what their engagement is with the staff and how that's taking place. And I have no problem sharing that with Members, and I think it's an important piece. Like, we've heard it many, many times on the floor of this House is that our staff need to be heard, and so we'll make sure there is some kind of documentation on how that is being done, and so we can share that with Members. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Minister of health. Any questions, more questions? Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's actually just a question of clarification. I have some questions about the midwifery program. I'm just wondering where we can actually find that on these pages because it's not specifically listed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I believe that one position, which is the one that sits within the department, is here because there was the specialist midwifery position that sits within the administrative and support services, and then the others fall under programs. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Minister of health. Member for Frame Lake, do you have a supplementary?

MR. MORSE: Yes, Madam Chair. Thank you. Okay, so considering there's a position here, I may as well just ask the question.

I understand that there's a certain amount of reduction being done to this program in this budget, and I'm just looking for some clarification. It looks like there's \$315,000 adjustment. You know, this is something that

MLAs fought for hard during the last budget negotiations. So can the Minister just clarify to us, and for the public, what exactly is happening here. Is this like a -- are they bringing the cut back, or what -- how can they explain this? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. So because the decision and everything happened partway through the year, I think there is -- the numbers in here, it's more of an accounting thing. The initial reduction was, I believe, around \$900,000, and that included 3.75 midwives, plus the position -- the specialist position in the department and the position of the territorial manager in NTHSSA. Those two positions were kept -- or negotiated back and came through a supplementary appropriation. So the money and for the remainder of the positions that are showing that are going down are just -- the funding was in the budgets, I think, until this fiscal year and so this is just accounting for those positions, those 3.75 positions that were still being removed at this time. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. And so could the Minister just describe for us, and for the public, what's being done with midwifery; what is the plan going forward so the public can have some reassurance that the department's still working on developing this program. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. So the midwifery program is still continuing in Fort Smith and continuing in Hay River. There's been no change to those programs. They still, however, struggle to staff those positions and the territorial manager and the specialist positions that were negotiated back was to be able to work on how -- you know, what is midwifery going to -- like, coming up with a plan on what midwifery can look like in the Northwest Territories and what it -- I guess and how we roll that out and how can we roll that out and what is the cost going to be. So those are the things that those two positions that were put back in to continue to try and to support that work to move forward, you know, in the future. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair -- or sorry, my apologies. Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a force of habit there. No, I'm okay for now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member for YK North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. My first question is simple. Under active positions, we've got an increase in one extra position in headquarters from 76 to 77. Can the Minister confirm what that extra position is. Is that the Tlicho cultural coordinator mentioned on the previous page, or is that a different new position?

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: It's moving the midwife position back into this, so that specialist midwife position. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member for YK North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you for that clarification. My next question is a bit broad. But I'm wondering if the work of the public administrator to review, you know, health care, you know, funding, and to try to figure out how we can right fund the health system, does that include examination of HSS work? I know that the public administrator has a mandate to oversee the health authority, the NTHSSA, but can they also look at -- obviously the health authority interacts with the department. And is there any authority there to make recommendations to the department on what could be done differently or more efficiently within the department? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. The PA, as it -- as standalone does not have the authority to look into the department, but the direction to the PA is to work directly with the deputy minister. And I think the other piece is to work directly with the health sustainability unit. So within all three of those pieces moving forward is how all of them are collaborating together on those -- like, to be able to ensure that, you know, that there's no duplication of services, that, you know, the -- where our programs are and the money that we're allocating to those programs and services, you know, within the whole of the health portfolio. I think one cannot work without the other because it's kind of like they're family, so they have to work together. And so that is the direction, and that is part of the mandate to

the -- that the PA has to be working alongside those other two areas. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you, Madam Chair. And so that is good to hear. And can the Minister also confirm that health care system sustainability unit also has the mandate to look into what HSS is doing and provide feedback there. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes, Madam Chair, the health sustainability unit is taking -- I mean, they have to analyze the entire system and that's where -- we cannot just analyze pieces of it. And if we continue to analyze pieces of it, then, you know, we don't know how those pieces are working together. So, yes, the health sustainability is -- and the deputy minister and her department and the PA have been directed to work, you know, all together so that way the whole system is being analyzed. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. That is good to hear. It's good to confirm.

We've heard that part of the business plans and priorities in this area is reviewing medical travel. First, is that part of the work under this area, administrative and support services, or should I leave questions about the medical travel review until we're actually looking at line items, say, within the health authority around medical travel? Can I just confirm that I can ask questions about the review process with this page that we're reviewing now?

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: That would be best left for the sup health benefits section. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you. I will postpone those questions until we're looking at supplementary health benefits. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. And next I have Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, my questions are around compensation and benefits, and I could just be confused. It's possible. But given that we had an increase in our union contract but looking at this activity and all the activities throughout, I do notice that the main estimates are lower in each case than the revised estimates for 2024-2025. I'm just wondering if I'm missing anything there, Madam Chair; if there's positions that are no longer there or if we've gotten rid of positions that were no longer filled. If I can get some kind of an explanation on that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: I can pass it on to the ADM.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Ms. Mathison.

MS. JEANNIE MATHISON: Thank you, Madam Chair. So the explanation there is that -- and just to confirm that, yes, throughout all of these activities there are increases related to the collective agreement because we have staff represented in all of these activities. And so what happened in 2024-2025 -- and you'll see there's change from the opening main estimates to the revised main estimates. In the revised main estimates is where, you know, the results of the negotiations are actually shown for the 2024-2025 year, and in some cases there because we were playing a little bit of catch-up and there was some retro that had to be given because of the delay in the negotiations, so that's why in some cases the numbers are higher there, and then they fall back to what the regular increase on an annual basis going forward would be in the 2025-2026 year. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, ADM Mathison. Member for Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, no, I appreciate that. And I did note in some of them, we're not to those activities but I did note in some it's still -- the compensation and benefits main estimates for 2025-2026 are still, in some cases, lower than they were in 2023-2024 as well as lower obviously than they are in the revised estimates, and that's what's kind of -- kind of caught my attention as I went through. So just wondering. So then to be clear, I guess, it wasn't -- it was the result of retro pay for the revised estimates, but was there any positions or unfilled positions that were removed in the department? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: I will pass that on to ADM Mathison to try to explain.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. ADM Mathison.

MS. JEANNIE MATHISON: Thank you, Madam Chair. And the explanation for that will be different depending on what activity we're in. But in this specific activity under the line compensation and benefits, so the change where you can see that it's going down from -- it's going from 11,616 to 12,536 and then down to 12,142, so the reason why it's going down from 11,616 to 12,142 is because we had time limited funding for a position for the Office of the Public Guardian that is coming out of there, and then it's offset by an increase related to the collective agreement bargaining. So that's then bringing it back up again. So that's the explanation for the change there. So the -- it's the position coming out -- the funding for the position coming out, offset by the retroactive -- or the collective bargaining funding going back in. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for that. And, yes, and I realize we're on this key activity. I'll hold my questions on the compensation and benefits until we get through the other activities, and now I've given them lots of time to prepare that answer as well. Nothing further, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): No further questions. Please turn to page 200. Health and Social Services, administrative and support services, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$69,306,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Moving on to health and social programs beginning on page 203 with information items on page 209. Are there any questions? Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll just wait for you to restart the clock. Thank you so much.

So on page 206. (I need new glasses; I have an appointment). The family violence prevention fund is a contribution that the department makes I believe -- or receives, I should say, I think from wage, but maybe the Minister can just confirm.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: I will turn that to over to deputy minister.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Cecchetto.

MS. JO-ANNE CECCHETTO: Thank you. So our budget for family violence is \$1.3 million. And that is broken down, and so the piece that actually comes from wage is about \$175,000 of that budget which is really -- that has been used to upgrade the crisis lines, for example, that are in the shelters, and the remaining of those -- that funding is coming from GNWT.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, deputy minister Cecchetto. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. So thank you for that explanation. And as the Minister knows, and I think all Members in this House know at this point, we do have the NWT Shelter Network asking for reinstatement of some funding, a pretty minimal amount of funding, but maybe the Minister could speak to why that funding is no longer in this budget. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, this funding reduction was done as the shelter networks use this fund -- the amount that's allocated that was reduced was for bringing people, you know, from the -- like, the staff from the shelters into Yellowknife to do training. This past year, my understanding is that the online training has been completed now and so that those staff within all of the regions now could do the training that they -- this training through virtual means. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Minister of health. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, I'll leave that there for now. I might have a different opinion than the Minister, but we can get into that tomorrow.

So could the Minister explain, then, the breakdown of the family violence prevention fund, where the \$1.1 million goes to. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Okay, so family violence prevention, \$274,000. National action plan to end

gender-based violence, \$782,000. And crisis hotlines responding to gender-based violence, \$125,000. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can the Minister please explain the \$782,000, what does that support. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Can I pass that on to the deputy minister, please. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Cecchetto.

MS. JO-ANNE CECCHETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair. So 500 of that fund is actually to provide shelter enhancement; 200 is actually to conduct a feasibility study about what are their infrastructure needs and therefore subsequent renovations; and, \$82,000 of that is to expand the What Will It Take campaign with a focus on specifically to youth. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just going to change line items for right now on my last five minutes here. I note on page 206, there is also mention of wastewater surveillance. The funding from Public Health Agency of Canada has ceased. Can the Minister please speak to how we are funding wastewater surveillance moving forward. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: I'll pass that to the deputy minister. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Cecchetto.

MS. JO-ANNE CECCHETTO: So you're correct, that funding has ended, and it was specifically around COVID. It is important to note that we are continuing to do wastewater monitoring, for example respiratory illnesses, and I will need to -- we would need to get back to as to the source of that funding.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. And, yeah, I would appreciate that breakdown. I just want to highlight it because it is something that's very near and a dear to a lot of my

constituents, became very important obviously, as the deputy minister mentioned, during COVID but we also have other novel illnesses -- or I guess maybe not novel illnesses but other airborne illnesses that are causing alarm bells in North America right now, so making sure that we have tracking capacity is really paramount to a lot of my constituents. So I'm happy that that's continuing in Yellowknife.

Can the Minister please speak to where else testing is occurring currently and if there are any plans for expansion. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to add with -- just further information -- and I know that as we're live here, I'm just pulling up more information on the wastewater. There currently is new funding, third-party funding, that will be continuing parts -- I think a part of this program ongoing. Where those communities are, I'll just pass it over to the deputy minister and she can speak to the communities that that's happening in right now currently. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Cecchetto.

MS. JO-ANNE CECCHETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair. The communities are Behchoko, Fort Simpson, Norman Wells, and Yellowknife, which actually collectively make up about 45 percent of the population. And we don't necessarily have plans at this moment in time to expand that to other communities and primarily that is also because of the limited funding in this area.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. That's a little bit concerning to me considering there are entire regions missing off that list, notably South Slave and the Delta. Is there anything that we can be doing to seek out further pots? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, as, you know, I mean, our chief public health officer I think is the lead in this area and I know that there is lots of work going on, you know, within her office on this specifically. But I mean, we can bring back the question to what is the issues on why it's only in these. And I know it's restricted to funding but if there are other things than what the costs might be to expand that, we can find out that

information and give that back to committee. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, I appreciate that. I believe I might be done for this so I will cede my time to another Member. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I have Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I have to ask it now, so I'll start with the compensation and benefits on this side as well. So I note that in 2023-2024, 14,904, 14,690 in the main estimates, 904 in the actuals. Then, as been explained to me, 16,494 in the revised estimates likely due to the retro pay, but then I note again it's down to 14,668 in the main estimates for 2026 which is, again, a little less than it was in 2023-2024. Again, I'm just wondering if there is -- if I'm missing something here or if there were any positions decreased or if this is just -- or positions that were maybe not filled that were no longer budgeted for. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. So the changes in this line here are because of the sunset of the cost share agreements. There are the northern wellness agreement funding. So with that funding, because of the timing of the negotiating of that agreement, it wasn't done in time for these mains but there are -- there are increases in those areas. But for this budget, it shows a decrease because of the sunset. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: So no cuts to positions, then, and no positions that weren't -- that were vacant then, that aren't being filled; can I just get clarity on that.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes, you're correct.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you. I'll just pivot to specialty services, Madam Chair. And I note in the comments what we know what specialty services refer to, and there's a lot of ologies in there that I likely can't pronounce, but that's great. And I note that it says treatment provided

in the NWT. So does this mean going from \$29 million to \$36 million and now to \$43 million that we are now providing more of these specialty services in the territory than we have previously where we had to pay that through -- likely through Alberta care or in other provinces; is that what we're doing? Are we ramping up all those ologies in the Northwest Territories, Madam Chair? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to get the ADM Mathison to explain that section. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): ADM Mathison.

MS. JEANNIE MATHISON: Thank you, Madam Chair. The increases there are -- they are for physician services within the Northwest Territories, yes. The increases are made up of a couple things. One is because we negotiated a new agreement with the NWTMA for the -- you know, the compensation for the physicians, so there's a big piece there.

Another piece is there was forced growth funding that was allocated to physician services to fund all those ologies that have been costing our system for a long time and contributing to deficits for which we are now allocating dollars and resources to those existing ologies that were already in place. So it's not new ologies. Same ologies, just now funding them at the level of service delivery. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you for that. Thank you, Madam Chair. And I'm super happy that we have all these ologies that we provide to our residents.

I'm not sure if you have this number, but can you kind of out of that -- you know, it's a fairly significant increase obviously to that line item, and you mentioned forced growth and you mentioned the medical association new contract. Does the Minister have kind of a breakdown of what kind of made up the majority of that increase? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. ADM Mathison.

MS. JEANNIE MATHISON: Thank you, Madam Chair. So the majority of the increase was us funding the historical shortfall in the ologies which is about \$6.5 million. There was \$1.6 million associated with the ratification of

the new contract with the NWT Medical Association. And there was another 1.6, coincidentally, that was tied to the ratification of the collective agreement with the GNWT because in that line item, in addition to the physicians, there are also the supporting staff in the offices that are, you know, supporting the physicians in those offices. So that's the majority of the increase in that line item. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for that answer. And I'll do one more, and then I'll -- I'm sure others would like to ask some questions on this.

The community clinics and health centres, likely the same answer. I'm not going to assume anything, but likely there was contracts in there. It did go from 88. I note the actuals 88 to 93 to now they're 114. I'm hoping, I'm liken to -- I hope that this means that our community clinics and health centres are getting more staff and getting more services. But can the Minister kind of talk about the increase to 114,930 in the community clinics and health centres, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to pass that on to the ADM Mathison.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. ADM Mathison.

MS. JEANNIE MATHISON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, and it's similar rationale. So in this line item, we would have physicians that were impacted by the negotiated contract that were family physicians. We would also have collective agreement increases for staff supporting, you know, the work that happens in the clinics and the health centres through the ratification of the collective agreement with the UNW as well as we were able to allocate funding for some of those existing services that had been delivered in the health centres and the clinics that were contributing to the historical deficit in the authorities for a number of years. Specifically, we were working -- we've added a budget in this area to address increases for relocation, for supplies, for accommodations, for temporary staff and, yeah, that's the majority of it. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thanks for those answers, and I'm good for right now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next I have Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. My question is on page 206 on the northern wellness initiative. I understand it expires at the end of this fiscal year. Is there any work being done on a renewal? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. That is -- the work is being done, yes, on that new agreement.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Mahsi, I'm glad to hear that. I'm looking at -- and being mindful, I'm being mindful of the Restoring Balance, and looking at the programs our government, through this department, is offering, and is it a practice of the department to do a mid-year surplus review? I'll give you an example.

After six months, doing a review if this program is really not being accessed or delivered, it seems to go on a priority 2 or 3. Is it a practice of the department to take the surplus and move it over to a more important accessible oversubscribed program? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. That is one thing that the health doesn't have is problems with surpluses so we do not have money to move around. Normally we don't -- you know, any money that we do -- I have yet to see any surpluses, sorry. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Yeah, this is more of a comment, Madam Chair. Yes, I understand the challenges of our government providing health care, particularly to the smaller remote communities, but I'm just curious on the financial practices of surplus reviews from programs. I particularly look at this one here on page 206. Let's see what it is. A healthy family program, actuals came in at 292 and our mains are expected 292. So if it's remaining the same, it tells me is anybody accessing that program? If not, can we move it to -- move the funds to a

more oversubscribed program? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, that contribution actually goes to the Tlicho government as a contribution. Thank you. And it's fully subscribed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I have Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Okay, I have a number of different questions under lots of different items here so I'm not sure if I'll get through it in ten minutes, but maybe I'll get a second chance.

I wanted to delve into child and family services to start. So it's my understanding from reviewing the annual reports from child and family services that about 25 percent of CFS staff positions are vacant and that number is even higher when we're looking at frontline staff. Can the Minister comment on whether there's a plan to try to address those vacancies which appear to be sort of a longstanding, chronic problem. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, this year we're hoping that because of the negotiated contract with the labour market supplement that applies now to child and family services workers, and there's different areas in that. I don't have the collective agreement in front of me to all of the different parts of child and family services. But that would -- you know, I would hope that that would help to encourage that. I know that within the department, it is a challenging department and, you know -- and I think that working, you know -- many people working in that area, it is a difficult area, department, to work on, so supporting those staff, and I think that's part of, like, the plan, you know, and then supporting with our recruitment and retention, is to making sure that we're reaching out to them as well to know within the next -- you know, for the plan is to how to support those staff so that they feel -- you know, stay in their positions. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you. And just quickly following up on that, does the Minister happen to know or is it published, the turnover rates amongst CFS staff? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: I don't have that detail in front of me, but I do believe that it was in their annual -- their public annual report on child and family services, so it is a public document. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. So in the business planning documents, it appears that HSS is promising or working on a new approach to child and family services programming. Can the Minister explain what direction that's going or what exactly we can expect to see from this new approach. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. So the direction that the child and family services is going in is -- it's kind of set into seven priorities:

- To serve children, youth, families, so working collaboratively with Indigenous governments and organizations;
- Care rooted in Indigenous practices;
- Support to care providers and caregivers;
- Strengthen youth supports and transition to adulthood;
- Specialized services closer to home;
- Strengthening human resource recruitment and
- Retention efforts for an inclusive and representative workforce; and,
- Reducing administrative demands for increased opportunities to connect with families.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm curious to know whether there's consideration within this new approach. I know that there's a much more emphasis on family preservation which is, of course, necessary and long overdue. But my understanding is that family preservation workers are sort of part and parcel working within the same office as case workers or those who might be involved in, say, child

apprehensions, that kind of thing, and so this might create some fear or barriers in families trying to seek those supports, family preservation, knowing that it's all sort of one office.

As part of this approach, is there any consideration being given to putting a bit more separation between the family preservation work that CFS is putting an increased emphasis on and child protection work? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I really appreciate that question because I think this is something that we had discussed many times in the last government, and I think that is the change that we need to look at, is family preservation workers are not a new -- like, they're new in the system that child and family services has -- you know, as Indigenous population is prominent in child and family services, there is that distrust, and so I appreciate the Member bringing this forward. But the change that is going on through the system is that the focus is on prevention. From the family preservation worker to the child and family services worker, it is to focus on supporting that child with their family and within their communities. You know, I can -- with the work that is being done and the trust that needs to be built, that is going to take some time and I think that what the public needs to know is that the direction of child and family services, even within the new -- like, the legislation that we are working -- currently working on is to making sure that the residents that need services feel safe when they go into this department and that they know that they can be supported even when they're at their lowest and most risk. And so that is the mindset change that we need to continue, and I think it's important that our staff are working to support each other because if we start splitting up our staff -- they're their support networks right now. And so however I do appreciate, but I need to know that the public needs to know that this department is to support families. So thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I do hope to continue the conversation with the Minister and in this House about this really important topic because it does seem like a system that is perpetually, you know, struggling and in crisis, and we're talking about the -- probably the most vulnerable people in our communities which is children who are experiencing problems in their families.

So it also says in the business plan that part of the work in this area is to redesign the foster care and respite services delivery programs. Can the Minister explain what that is intended to do, what's the intention of that redesign? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. With that detail, I'll pass it on to the deputy minister.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Deputy minister Cecchetto.

MS. JO-ANNE CECCHETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair. One of the examples that I would give is our foster rates. Foster care rates have been the same for many, many years so one of the ways that we want to be able to redesign this work is to ensure that those families that are supporting our children in care are actually being compensated and providing the resources -- necessary resources. So we've recently -- those foster care rates were recently increased. And just also working very closely with our partners such as the Foster Family Coalition and just making sure that those families have the supports that they need. So that's just one example of the way in which we are wanting to redesign and prioritize the foster care system.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thanks, Madam Chair. With the remaining time I have in this segment, I also just wanted to ask about -- I think there was a commitment in -- I'm not even sure which document it comes from now. But due to the closures of NWT residential treatment centres for children and youth, there were plans to pilot land-based healing youth programs to try to fill some of those gaps and there was an intention, anyway, in December 2023 to pilot a cultural wellness camp for youth with complex needs. So -- and this sort of bleeds partly into community mental wellness and addictions recovery too I think. But can the Minister give an update on what programs are ongoing to fill the gap left by the closures of those NWT residential treatment centres for children and youth, and I guess where that shows up in this budget. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister for Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. So there was a pilot that did happen, and planning is underway on how to move forward to post a contract for youth land-based

therapeutic programming, including aftercare services. So NTHSSA is working to propose the reallocation of monies from what was previously Trailcross Treatment to that; however, that work is ongoing and, you know, we also -- within child and family services, they do utilize other services. Sometimes they use out of territory services to support families if they need -- if they have needs immediately, individually and family, that they're supporting, so that is what we have at this time. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Members, we will give Members a second chance to ask more questions in this area but for right now, I have the Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Child and family services, here within the budget, you know, 2023-2024 it was like 4.46. Are we on -- I'm on page 205. Okay, so there's an increase from 46 -- from that time and then 2024-2025 and then there was a -- it revised -- the budget was revised -- the estimate was revised. And then 2025-2026 went to 52. I don't know if this is good or bad because, you know, child and family services. So is this -- okay. So I know that this takes care of the -- you know, the -- all the NWT. And so how much of this is for child and family services program that are for the children in care and the support program? I mean, that's a huge increase from 2023-2024 to current, so it means that the children in care, did it increase as well? Thank you

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll have the ADM Mathison break down where that change is. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. ADM Mathison.

MS. JEANNIE MATHISON: Thank you, Madam Chair. And the increase in this area, a lot -- you'll hear me say this a lot is that a lot of the increase in the areas are due to the collective agreement increases negotiated with the UNW. So there's about \$3.6 million of increase that's associated with that. There was also an additional \$3 million that were added to fund the delivery of programs that were already existing and to address things such as the increased foster care rates that the deputy minister spoke about earlier. So that is new money that's added into the budget to address those pressures as well. And that is the -- those are the two reasons for the increase over last year. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: So it was mainly for compensations and benefits within that area, okay. Okay, thank you.

Another one too here, community wellness and addiction recovery support program. You know, we don't have no treatment program and we do have addiction issues. We have a crisis among our young people, and it's all the communities in the territory are affected, and we all know of someone who is suffering with addictions. And then there's mental health and addiction recovery fund. There's mental health and addiction recovery capacity building funds. You know, it's good there's programs but there's one here, northern wellness initiative. Is that the one that you mentioned that was sunsetted that -- with the federal program? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of health.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. That is, and I think we are -- it's in the works right now to be renegotiated. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, yes, thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. I know that there's -- we do have a lot of mental health issues too in the small communities, you know. Like, I mean, we have lots of issues in small communities because we have high rates of unemployment, housing crisis. There's accumulation of all the social issues. It's all -- you know, it all goes back to mental health issues. So I just wanted to ask if they know or if they're working with Indigenous governments or organizations to take on -- you know, if they're working with these organizations to take on more of a mental health and addiction services in the regions? Are they working with the Indigenous government? I just want -- I want to ask if they're doing anything to help the Indigenous government or organizations that want to provide mental health services to its people. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, we do provide community counsellors and wellness workers within most regions in the Northwest Territories but what we also -- you know, and I've mentioned this in this House, what we -- the direction that has come from Indigenous governments is that they want to have a fund to be able to access funds to be

able to provide those types of programs in their own way in their own regions, and so what we do have is the community wellness and recovery -- or wellness and addictions recovery fund. And I know that most of the regions access this -- Indigenous governments access this fund. It is -- some of them have multi-year agreements so that they can plan, like, programming. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. I appreciate that, the answer.

Healthy choices fund went up from 2023-2024, and healthy family program stayed the same. I mean, those two are very important for many of our communities because I know it's being used a lot. I'm on page 206. So why does healthy family program have not changed? Is it going to continue well into the future or, like, is there -- because it just stopped at that number, stayed the same from 2023, didn't move or didn't go down. That is an important program for many of our communities, and healthy choices fund as well. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the healthy family program that's itemized in this section on 206, the 292 that the Member is referring to, is a contribution that goes directly to the Tlicho government. And then the -- the healthy choices fund is a -- like, it is -- I think it's an application-based, and there are 13 applicants that have applied through this fund for -- and I can provide that list, if you want, to committee afterwards. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you for the information, yes. I have no more other questions on this topic as well. So thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Members. Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

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

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): 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? The motion is carried.

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress.

Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses out of the chamber. Thank you.

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. SPEAKER: Report of Committee of the Whole. Member from the Deh Cho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 275-20(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: Thank you, Member from Deh Cho. Do I have a seconder? Member from Monfwi. She's done a great job today. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? The motion passed.

---Carried

Third reading of bills. Orders of the day, Mr. Clerk.

Orders of the Day

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Thursday, February 13th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer or Reflection
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Motions
 - Motion 46-20(1), Extended Adjournment of the House to February 25, 2025
5. Returns to Oral Questions
 - Oral Question 475-20(1), Budgeting Process for Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority
6. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
7. Replies to the Budget Address (Day 6 of 7)
8. Acknowledgements
9. Oral Questions
10. Written Questions
11. Returns to Written Questions

12. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
13. Petitions
14. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
15. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
16. Tabling of Documents
17. Notices of Motion
18. Motions
19. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
20. First Reading of Bills
21. Second Reading of Bills
22. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates
 - Bill 12, Business Day Statute Law Amendment Act
23. Report of Committee of the Whole
24. Third Reading of Bills
25. Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Thursday, February 13th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

