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The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Tuesday, February 11, 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. I'd like to thank Elder Mitchell for the reflection today.

Ministers' statements. Minister for Housing NWT.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 91-20(1):
NWT HOUSING SYMPOSIUM 2025

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the recent Housing Symposium that was hosted by the NWT Housing Forum on January 22nd and 23rd in Yellowknife. This year's symposium marked the first in-person gathering since the forum began in 2023. Over the course of two days, we engaged in important discussions, shared innovative ideas, and strengthened our partnerships.

I want to extend my gratitude to over 85 representatives from Indigenous governments, bands, non-governmental organizations, municipal and community governments, industry, and the federal and territorial governments who participated in this year's symposium. Your involvement demonstrates our shared commitment to solving housing challenges in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, the symposium explored key topics such as skills and workforce development, the housing needs assessment, construction and design innovation, federal funding, service integration, and housing stability. These discussions are crucial for creating sustainable housing solutions, especially for our most vulnerable populations.

One of the key outcomes of this year's symposium was the reinforcement of our partnerships and collaboration opportunities. By working together, we can present a united voice to the federal government highlighting the

unique housing needs of the NWT and advocating for the necessary support and resources.

Mr. Speaker, the symposium included an inspiring keynote speaker, Mr. David Fortin, a Metis architect. David emphasized the same teachings Indigenous people have valued for centuries - green architecture, natural materials, sustainability, and connection with the earth to inform the design of homes. He described houses as living organisms that should co-exist with the culture, language, and values of their inhabitants.

I am particularly encouraged by the emphasis on construction design and innovation, highlighting the importance of a sustainable and culturally relevant housing solution for the North.

Ne'rahten Developments Ltd and Taylor Architecture Group presented updates on the K'asho Go'ine Housing Society construction centre, emphasizing its role in creating jobs and fostering economic stability through local employment and training. Additionally, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, in collaboration with the Taylor Architecture Group, introduced a new housing design catalogue aimed at providing adaptable and energy-efficient housing designs tailored to the unique needs of northern communities. These initiatives underscore the forum's commitment to leveraging innovative construction practices to address the pressing housing challenges in the Northwest Territories. There were also sessions on skills and workforce development.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident that the insights and strategies developed during this symposium will guide us in building a stronger, more resilient housing sector in the NWT. Together, we can ensure that every resident has access to safe, affordable, and sustainable housing. Quyananni, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Ministers' statements. Deputy Premier.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 92-20(1):
PREMIER ABSENT FROM THE HOUSE

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise the House that the honourable Member from Hay River North, the Premier, will be absent from the House for the remainder of this week to attend to the Council of Federation in Washington, DC. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Deputy Premier. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Range Lake.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 472-20(1): CROSSWALK AND INTERSECTION INFRASTRUCTURE

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, we certainly have our work cut out for us here in this chamber. From mine closures to the housing crisis, Arctic sovereignty to Indigenous reconciliation, there is no shortage of complicated issues we've been elected to find solutions for. Today, however, I want to speak about a problem that is much simpler to understand but just as serious to the safety and well-being of the public - crosswalks and intersections.

The problem is clear-cut. Motorists are going to drive, pedestrians are going to walk, and children are often going to be a little less predictable when they appear. Yet, we have crosswalks in my riding of Range Lake where the lights aren't functioning at all or don't even exist at all. Just in front of Range Lake North School at Borden Drive and Rivett Crescent, my constituents have been crossing without knowledge that a button they pressed did not initiate a warning to drivers that they were present resulting in some extremely close calls. This issue was a fairly major concern in the riding and actually made the local news.

Farther up Borden Drive, the crosswalk between Nova Plaza and Walmart has no lights at all. On some days, that narrow stretch of road can be best described as organized chaos. The flow of vehicles is constant, especially as those which turn in often, quickly turn once more to the parking lot at their destination. Meanwhile, people are often frustratedly standing trying to cross, and just a few metres beyond, that lies a busy bus stop on a tight bend.

I do want to commend the city of Yellowknife for quickly initiating repairs to the crosswalk lights by Range Lake North School and adding temporary signage to minimize any confusions. In fact, as I drove in to work today, I saw a crew of workers from the city finally fixing these lights. This may be a Range Lake issue, but truly all politics begins at a local level. My Range Lake constituents brought these concerns forward, the local administration

applied their knowledge and resources to find the solutions, so now we have to do our part contributing the resources necessary to ensure school zones are the safest they can be and no matter the mode of transportation, everyone can get to and from their destination safely. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 473-20(1): INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT POLICY

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Choosing our youth for the public service:

Mr. Speaker, Indigenous youth are the future of the NWT, and we need more young people in the public service, Mr. Speaker. In April, the government will implement a new Indigenous employment policy. The Minister of Finance has said her department will now focus on recruiting people who are Indigenous to the present boundaries of the Northwest Territories. Mr. Speaker, I am concerned for our youth. They are already on an uneven playing field when we look at outcomes in our education system.

Many young people leave the territory for post-secondary education. We need to give them a reason to come back. We need to prioritize Indigenous students seeking public service employment under programs like the Schools North Apprenticeship Program (SNAP) and the summer student employment programs as well as internships. The government must do more to advertise in small communities. They must recruit Indigenous students and allow more time for students to apply for job postings.

The GNWT increased the amount of student financial assistance funding. Mr. Speaker, this is great news for Indigenous students pursuing post-secondary education but we need to incentivize, train, and retain our youth. Let's keep our best and our brightest in the territory whether that means co-op placements within vacant GNWT positions or transitioning students from Aurora College into GNWT jobs. More must be done to place Indigenous youth in the GNWT and keep them there. I will have questions for the Minister of Finance. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 474-20(1): BLACK HISTORY MONTH

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Happy Black History Month. Once again, the black advocacy coalition Up North, or Back Up North, is holding many free events and workshops throughout the month of February. Our territory is richer for all the contributions of its black residents from the worldwide diaspora, Mr. Speaker, and these events help us celebrate our neighbours.

Back Up North has already held a mental health workshop and a workshop on AI and the impact on black businesses. Still to come is a cooking workshop this weekend from 11 to 5 both days at Ecole Allain St-Cyr; and, on Saturday, February 22nd, there will be a black arts exhibition here in the legislative Assembly's Great Hall including art, once again, from Inemesit Graham whose art I have promoted in this House in previous sittings.

Mr. Speaker, all these events culminate with the Black History Month gala at the Chateau Nova here in Yellowknife on March 8th. It promises to be an evening of elegance, live music, cultural performances, and celebration. Tickets go on sale tomorrow at noon so keep your eyes peeled to the Back Up North social media for tickets. It's quite the party, Mr. Speaker, and I hope many MLAs and residents can attend. Tickets are sure to sell out. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Members' statements. Member from the Sahtu.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 475-20(1):
CLOSURE OF COMMUNITY LEARNING
CENTRES BY AURORA COLLEGE

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Closure of community learning centres: Mr. Speaker, the Sahtu region, like other regions of the Northwest Territories, heard loud and clear the closures of 19 community learning centres. Mr. Speaker, the Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated shares this frustration.

Mr. Speaker, of this, the Sahtu region will see nine job losses. This action has created a number of issues, barriers on capacity, at a time that is critically important on workforce readiness. Mr. Speaker, I highlight two major projects on our horizon: Number 1, the Norman Wells oil field closure; Number 2, the Yamoga, American, Fort Good Hope Construction Centre, a \$15 million investment, this facility designed to build modular homes.

Mr. Speaker, education is a lifelong journey. Our success is our efforts as students, learners, parents, leaders, and more importantly as the government responsible for designing and

implementation of a education curriculum that works.

Mr. Speaker, of these two initiatives are forecasted realities. I propose through collaboration, with the Department of ECE, the Sahtu can and must create a designed Indigenous northern training plan, a plan that is tailored by the Sahtu for the Sahtu. We are talking about our children's future.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard loud and clear on the demand for trades, professional positions, career security for our youth. Now the community learning centres' closures is a setback. However, as mentioned earlier, a joint regional leadership collaboration is inevitable. This approach will ensure, through meaningful engagements, discussions, renewed plans for the prosperity. Later I'll have questions for the appropriate Minister. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Members' statements. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 476-20(1):
MILITARY OPERATION NANOOK IN INUVIK

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak today about a large military operation happening in Inuvik in the Beaufort Delta. Of course, Mr. Speaker, I'm talking about Operation Nanook. From February 4th until March 20th, upwards of about 750 military personnel, including a large reserve contingent from Newfoundland and Labrador and New Brunswick, as well as allies from the USA and Belgium, Mr. Speaker, and they're going to have air and ground exercises involving several other countries.

Mr. Speaker, this is a huge, obviously, economic benefit to the community of Inuvik, and the town of Inuvik alone, in just leasing of their space, upwards of \$140,000, not to mention the equipment rentals, warehouse rentals, the impacts on our local stores, our craft shops, and so on and so forth, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as well, a large contingent of senior federal officials to see the operation later in February will be coming up to Inuvik and to kind of better understand the role of Inuvik and the NWT in securing the Arctic. A large media contingent during the operation to report the events will include W5, CBC, and many others.

This event, Mr. Speaker, showcases how NATO and NORAD countries are working together in the Canadian Western Arctic that demonstrates the Canadian Armed Forces capability to protect and sustain forces in the

High Arctic under the harshest conditions and test new capabilities with our allies.

Mr. Speaker, I was discouraged to hear the leader of the opposition publicly announce that they're going to be looking at building a new Arctic military base in Iqaluit. Not to disparage our friends in Nunavut but, Mr. Speaker, Inuvik has an FOL base with an airstrip that has been extended, as we know, to accept the latest USA fighter jets, and the strip will be continue to be upgraded and fully tarred up there, Mr. Speaker.

Inuvik, as you know, is already a NORAD base with the existing capacity to immediately house 250 military personnel, and it can readily accept the need for an expanded military base and supporting infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be urging the Premier to reach out to whoever the next Prime Minister will be to certainly let them know that we expect the government to commit to not only fully funding the Mackenzie Valley Highway up to Tsiigehtchic to join into the Dempster Highway but certainly to make sure they do their homework and to realize that the practical reality is that Inuvik is best suited for this type of infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Members' statements. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 477-20(1):
MEDICAL TRAVEL ACCOMMODATIONS
FOR MACKENZIE DELTA RESIDENTS

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Webster's dictionary defines quality as the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs. Patients who travel to Yellowknife are, indeed, not receiving quality service in terms of accommodations. Residents of my riding are stating that they are being treated like second or third-class citizens by their very own government.

When I last brought up this very concern in the fall of 2024, the Minister stated the current contract would be up and the new contract details will address this accommodation concern while I am still receiving calls to address this very concern. Mr. Speaker, every time the concern of Quality Inn comes before the Minister and her department, they do not have a concrete solution. Maybe the solution is out there in the communities and with its residents.

The Nunavut government is taking their health department to the communities and want to

hear from their residents. Imagine if this government decided to conduct a community consultation within each of the communities throughout the Northwest Territories? This would be a milestone approach for this government.

Personally, I'm running out of questions to ask the Minister and her department as to why our Indigenous population is subject to these deplorable conditions. The details of their contract and/or lack of accommodations within the city is no longer a valid answer. The majority of these patients that are travelling to Yellowknife are for dental purposes. Last year, there was talk about sending some of the patients to a different jurisdiction to receive dental care. This option would assist in the concern of quality service. It would be good if the talks were still ongoing.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I do not know what else I can say to bring comfort to the residents of my riding who have to travel to Yellowknife and be placed in this establishment. Like I stated, maybe the general public has the answer. Let's take it to the communities and its residents and resolve its ongoing concern once and for all. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have questions for the Minister responsible for Health and Social Services.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Members' statements. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 478-20(1):
ABANDONED ENVIRONMENTAL LEGACIES

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The legacy of colonialism in the North is just our legacy of intergenerational trauma due to the tragedy of residential school and many of the other practices which harm our culture and ways of life but also trauma and harms to our northern environment. Through the past decade, development in the North meant often little care was given to pollution and contaminants from industry which went on to cause chronic and acute illness still felt today and will be felt for a long time into the future.

My constituents of Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh have many of these issues -- illnesses present, especially cancer, which were unknown or rare just a few generations ago. These links, these illnesses, too many examples of neglectful practices from government and industry. We all know the example of Giant Mine just down the road and how it affected the Yellowknives Dene First Nation. But I want to bring forward another example from Lutselk'e that is lesser known outside the community.

In May 1970, a Wardair Bristol Freighter crashed on the ice. It was not a serious crash because all on board survived, but it could not be salvaged because it was firmly stuck in the ice that was about to melt. Therefore, it was left to sink just a short distance away from the community. They know where it is but it's not clear any assessment was done. A Bristol Freighter contains two 300-gallon fuel tanks, along with hydraulic fluids, and parts of that, when degraded, could be harmful to the environment. Because this plane sank in one piece with little damage, the fuel could still be leaking today. The community leaders want to bring these concerns forward and give the task to the GNWT who may need to partner with the federal government to help on this issue.

Like all communities, Lutselk'e wants to know if the territorial government will partner with them and connect them to more resources needed to clean up the surroundings from the harmful legacies of the past. And I will have questions for the Minister of ECC at the appropriate time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 479-20(1):
MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS IN DEHCHO
COMMUNITIES

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

Mr. Speaker, today I would like to talk about mental health supports, particularly in Deh Cho communities. Mr. Speaker, more and more people need access to mental health supports and shelter services. In the Budget Address last week, we heard that the government is focused on supporting changes that address the effects of trauma and that the GNWT will support residents with mental health and addiction needs, including walk-ins and same day access for community counselling.

Mr. Speaker, last November, the GNWT created an on-the-land camp along the Ingraham Trail only after shelters in Yellowknife reached capacity. I would like to see us support similar initiatives in Deh Cho communities. Mr. Speaker, people in my riding need recovery and mental wellness supports now and for when they return from treatment to be successful back home.

Recently, Deh Gah Gotie First Nation was awarded funding for a 60-bed supportive housing facility to help women and families in Fort Providence. This is good, Mr. Speaker, but the Government of the Northwest Territories

needs to offer similar supports because 60 beds will fill up quickly.

The web page for the Deh Cho Regional Health and Social Services Authority states that it employs 90 employees who provide health and social services such as mental health and counselling. Residents need to know how they can access these services. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services at the appropriate time, Mr. Speaker. Mahsi.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 480-20(1):
DECHINTA CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND
LEARNING

MS. MORGAN: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I tabled a report by the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning which is an Indigenous-centered educational institution based here in the Northwest Territories. It integrates traditional knowledge and land-based learning into post-secondary education.

The report describes the results of a three-year study to determine what are the economic benefits of investing in Indigenous-centered adult education. Surveys and interviews were conducted with Dechinta students, alumni, staff, and elders to gather information on their educational goals and achievements, labour market participation, health, mental health, and life satisfaction.

The report focuses on the return on investment, specifically for Indigenous students living in the North. Now, unsurprisingly, both students and employed elders reported improvements in their health and mental health, but what is more remarkable is the concrete social and financial impacts that were documented. The report found that if you have a community where more Indigenous adults get even one year of post-secondary education, the all-cause mortality in that community -- so the number of deaths -- can be reduced by 9 percent. The estimated marginal tax revenue for just one cohort of Dechinta students is \$3.6 million per year due to the increased labour market participation.

Yesterday I was talking about how adult education should not be treated as a remedial program that highlights someone's failures to graduate from high school. Instead, it can be transformative. And that's exactly what Dechinta is trying to do. Beyond individual literacy, beyond even family-based literacy, this is community-based literacy in action. The learning semesters involve everyone together

out on the land, you have adult students along with elders, and even children's programs alongside them.

Now, Dechinta does not replace the need for other post-secondary options and the kinds of programs that are offered by colleges and polytechnic institutes and universities. Where Dechinta has been very effective is as a gateway for adults to build confidence that they do belong in secondary learning and they don't need to leave culture, community, and traditional knowledge behind to gain further education. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, member from Yellowknife North. Members' statements. Member from Frame Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 481-20(1):
AURORA POLYTECHNIC TRANSITION

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we often hear the saying in sports, you miss 100 percent of the shots that you don't take. Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to suggest that the same thing is true in terms of attracting funding for government projects, funding for projects such as the polytechnic university. And I want to speak a little bit today about what we're missing out on by not bringing the polytechnic to fruition as quickly as we need to.

Mr. Speaker, in November, Inuit Nunangat University initiative received \$50 million donation from the Mastercard Foundation, and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami president Natan Obed said his organization would be requesting an additional \$50 million of support from the federal government in the upcoming budget.

Mr. Speaker, as I've spoken about several times in this House, Yukon University has attracted a lot of funding because they transitioned to a university, and they chose to go forward with a visionary plan, and in 2019, the federal government gave them \$26 million for a new science facility.

Mr. Speaker, eyes are looking north. There are millions of dollars being put towards northern universities for infrastructure and research, but we are not capturing this money.

Mr. Speaker, the foundational review of Aurora College noted that this is an increasingly competitive environment, and the NWT stands at risk of falling behind our neighbours. That is exactly what I see happening now seven years after the foundational review was released. Mr. Speaker, the NWT is way behind our neighbours in the Yukon and, now, I fear that I see us falling behind Nunavut as well.

Mr. Speaker, applied research is a key focus of polytechnics and takes several forms. A unique one is collaborative research programs involving faculty, students, and industry or community partners. This kind of offering would help Aurora College become a hub for northern-led research bringing important research dollars into our communities. A recent study by Polytechnics Canada found that for every dollar invested in applied research, there is a return that ranges from a low of \$8 to a high of \$18. For example, since transitioning to university status in 2013, research dollars at Saskatchewan Polytechnic grew from \$845,000 to \$6.3 million. I've run out of time, Mr. Speaker. I'll have to finish this story tomorrow. But I'll have questions for the Minister of ECE at the appropriate time. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 482-20(1):
INCOME ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Income assistance helps families at risk in several ways, and I'm very supportive of this. A civil society, as we all know, tries to collectively help each other in ways that no one is left too far behind. Income assistance does offer immediate assistance in crisis, job loss, illness, and many other reasons to help stabilize the family. This, we all know. And we know, at the same time, it doesn't fix every problem but, again, stability and making sure they're okay is a contributing principal of the program.

Mr. Speaker, but the backstop is exactly what is - a backstop of basics. It's not meant to be a lottery despite how some people believe it is. Mr. Speaker, basic coverage really could mean anywhere from food and housing, as already mentioned, but the principle is we need to make sure people are okay. But that said, where do we continue to the next phase? What is next?

I often think the system fails itself because it's not focused purely on where do we go next. The important question is yes, we've helped you from spiralling down further, like the torrent spiral of the gravity pull of someone getting down further and further into despair, Mr. Speaker; the question is who is throwing a rope to help people out. Who is plying the ladder to say let's help you climb out together. Mr. Speaker, we cannot leave people adrift alone because that's exactly what we get, is that helping them with the basics and saying you're on your own is exactly where many people stay.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage, and if not say demand, the system starts asking this serious

question of saying why aren't we providing navigators to help people find their way to the next phase? We must not view this as an impossible challenge but as a possible challenge of a way we can change lives for the better. Mr. Speaker, through an empowerment attitude and process, our navigators, through the income support program, can inspire people to say how can we make today better than yesterday; how can we make tomorrow better than any other day you've seen so far?

Mr. Speaker, there was a time when income support did have social workers in their program. Now that was a long time ago, and I won't go into that. Someone may, of course, may have thought, wow, they're just data entry jobs. But what's been changed is that critical part of the conversation about empowerment. They're not data entry people. They are people who are on the frontline making a positive difference in those lives. I think we could work together to help change people at risk, families at risk, to stable, strong, contributors to society. We can do this together. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Whoops, I got ahead of myself. It was Members' statements, not oral questions. So let's go back to Members' statements.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 483-20(1):
RETIREMENT OF MIKE DRAKE

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Good afternoon, Colleagues. Today, I am going to recognize a long service member of the public service, Mr. Mike Drake.

I had the pleasure of knowing him for over 20 plus years. I first got to know him when he moved to Fort Liard to become a social worker for the community. In true Mike's fashion, after a couple of years of getting a good handle on his job he wanted to be more involved in the community, if that was possible. He became the fire chief and the mayor. The community greatly appreciated his commitment and willingness to help where he was needed.

After there, the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs came calling for a community governance advisor and deputy chief municipal elections officer. Like he told me, it was something new and interesting which excited him, especially the opportunity to provides advice, training, and support to community governments and to Municipal and Community Affairs on community governance, legislation, bylaw making, supporting the development and advancement of workable, affordable, and efficient form of local and

regional governments and implementation of the new Aboriginal self-governments. As well, the position had an impact on nearly all residents in the Northwest Territories through support to all 33 community governments and Indigenous governments.

In 2010, he moved to the Yukon for a very brief time as the SAO, but he and his family missed the NWT and the Deh Cho region. Lucky for him, the regional superintendent position came open for the Deh Cho region and he applied. He spent over ten years in Fort Simpson as the regional superintendent. For the first five years, I got to work with him and got to know his wife and daughter. They were very happy to be back. We were thankful what he liked about the job and would say the department's work in the region in supporting communities increasing resources, authority, and responsibility over areas and working with the communities in regards to their emergency management organization. One of his assets was his ability to speak Dene Zhatie. He was able to have conversations with elders and leadership in their traditional language explaining the process and procedures when needed.

After 2021, he had the opportunity to take on the same role with the Tli Cho region. He thoroughly enjoyed his time there but the need to see other parts of the country came a calling and he and his wife retired and moved to BC.

I would like to wish him and his family all the best in his retirement. Thank you for your service for the Deh Cho, TliCho, and residents of the Northwest Territories.

MR. SPEAKER: Members' statements. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills. Member from Frame Lake.

**Reports of Committees on the Review
of Bills**

BILL 12:
BUSINESS DAY STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, your committee would like to report on its consideration of Bill 12, the Business Day Statute Law Amendment Act.

Bill 12 received second reading in the Legislative Assembly on October 30th, 2024 and was referred to the Standing Committee on Government Operations for review. The standing committee completed its clause-by-clause review of the bill with the Minister of Justice on February 10th, 2025.

Mr. Speaker, the committee reports that Bill 12, the Business Day Statute Law Amendment Act, is ready for consideration in Committee of the Whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills. Reports of Standing and Special Committees. Member from Great Slave.

Reports of Standing and Special Committees

COMMITTEE REPORT 21-20(1):
REPORT ON THE CHIEF ELECTORAL
OFFICER'S REPORT ON THE
ADMINISTRATION OF THE 2023
TERRITORIAL GENERAL ELECTION,
RECEIVED AND ADOPTED

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, your Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges is pleased to provide its Report on the Chief Electoral Officer's Report on the Administration of the 2023 Territorial General Election and commends it to the House.

Introduction

In accordance with subsection 266(2) of the Elections and Plebiscites Act, the chief electoral officer is required to submit a report on the administration of election-related activities within six months following a territorial general election. This report includes any issues the CEO deems important for the Legislative Assembly and offers recommendations for enhancing election administration, as well as suggestions for potential amendments to the Act.

The Speaker tabled the CEO's report on May 21st, 2024, in the Legislative Assembly and was subsequently referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges for review and response to the recommendations.

From September 2, 2024, to September 27, 2024, committee invited public input on the CEO's report, receiving two written submissions. On September 27th, 2024, the committee held a public briefing with CEO Stephen Dunbar and deputy chief electoral officer Charlotte Digness. During this session, Mr. Aleks Toivainen from Vote16 Canada also provided testimony, focusing on the CEO's recommendation to lower the voting age in the Northwest Territories to 16.

Committee made two recommendations in Committee Report 18-20(1), Interim Report on the Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the

Administration of the 2023 Territorial General Election, recommending a repeal and replacement of the Elections and Plebiscites Act before the end of the 20th Assembly, and that the CEO engage with the Northwest Territories Association of Communities to determine how to better support local authority election activities.

In the report, committee noted that they would like to continue their investigation into the recommendation of the CEO to lower the voting age to 16 and will provide a separate report in the 2025 Winter Sitting of the Legislative Assembly on their findings and the response to this recommendation.

Lowering the Voting Age to 16

Committee has undertaken further work on the CEO's recommendation to lower the voting age to 16 and has not reached consensus on the recommendation.

Committee's work has highlighted that there may be a number of viable solutions to improving low voter turnout in the Northwest Territories. As such, committee feels that the CEO's recommendation should be considered as a part of a larger conversation about broader engagement and empowerment of the electorate. Committee believes that this issue warrants further study and should be accompanied by an appropriately expanded mandate for committee to consider the full scope of potential options, including recommending policy and legislative options.

Recommendation 1: The Standing Committee on Procedures and Privileges recommends that the Speaker refer the broader matter of low voter turnout in the Northwest Territories to the Standing Committee on Procedures and Privileges to be studied and reported on.

Conclusion

Committee wishes to thank the members of the public who provided written submissions and the witnesses who participated in committee's public hearing in September 2024.

Committee would like to once again express its gratitude to Elections NWT for their hard work, commitment, and support, not only to the election candidates but also to the residents of the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Hay River South, that Committee

Report 21-20(1), Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges Report on the Review of the Chief Electoral Officer's Report on the Administration of the 2023 Territorial General Election - Lowering Voting Age to 16, be received and adopted by the Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstention? Motion has been carried. So the motion has been carried. Committee report has been received and adopted by the Assembly. Thank you.

---Carried

Reports of Standing and Special Committees. Returns to oral questions. Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 476-20(1):

PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP TO SUPPORT THE ROCKHILL PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my Member's statement today I talked about trying to find ways to empower people to -- actually, you know what, Mr. Speaker, I'll redirect my question if you give me the moment to leave. I would like to now point my question to the Minister of housing, and my question was a year ago I had asked her about how we could uplift housing opportunities, such as the Rockhill Apartment, and work with private industry to find new ways and innovative ways to provide social housing for people, innovative for business, and get people living a much healthier lifestyle.

Mr. Speaker, would the Minister of housing be able to update me on the potential partnership or idea I proposed to her a year ago about getting private industry involved in the Rockhill property that's been sitting empty for years. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. The Minister responsible for Housing NWT.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Rockhill properties, we do have an agreement with a local NGO to develop Rockhill properties. The agreement is in force until the end of March 2025, so we still have a bit of time with the local NGO. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Has there been any movement or indication that something's actually going to be done on that property; and if so, can the Minister update the House? Thank you.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No movement yet. I did ask Housing NWT for some information, and we don't have any updated information at this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Member from Yellowknife Centre. Last supplementary.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think I believe the Minister sent me a draft version or some type of copy of the agreement. She nodded, and I remember going through it. I asked, or I'm curious, on cancellation provisions knowing -- my question's going towards cancellation provisions. So in other words, is there a way that the Minister can cancel this initiative so we can actually go out and find a partner who can actually bring real opportunity to support housing for much needed people and families. Thank you.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And as noted, meeting with the MLA last August, I believe, of 2024, we did discuss cancellation provisions. So the local NGO does have to come up with funding for their program or their proposal, and they have until the end of March 2025 to provide that and then the clause in terms of cancellation provisions will be in effect. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Housing NWT. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 477-20(1):

PAY AND BENEFITS FOR EARLY
CHILDCARE PROVIDERS

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as a parent with young children, daycare is very important in my life, very important for many Northerners. In speaking with day home providers, which are their own industry, it seems like there's some pretty significant issues that are challenging their ability to operate. I've spoken with the Minister about this. I'm hoping she can give some answers to the public now. There seems to be a dispute around pay. Day home operators maintain, at least the ones I've been speaking to, that they make less than minimum wage grid that is being developed for centre operators. So can the Minister explain how the \$3.5 million that ECE has for early learning childcare is

going to benefit day home operators. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when we sat in this room back when that first came up when we were reviewing the main estimates, it was discussed that there was a desire to seek wage parity between centre-based providers and people who were working as classroom assistants in our JK to 12 education system. As it stands, our home-based educators have already achieved that parity based on their higher aftertax income that they do have. However, our centre-based providers still do make less than our education assistants. And so the goal there is to use that \$3.5 million that, thank you, was secured by Regular Members in order to increase that amount and bring them to parity with classroom assistants.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, day homes are also required to complete a mandatory 80-hour course, the Alberta essentials course, but they don't get any time off to do this. It doesn't count as a training day. They're being told they have to use their vacation days to do this training. Why is the department not allowing these to be counted as training days and why are they not -- and let's just leave it there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a 54-hour course that people without post-secondary education are required to complete in order to be considered certified under the new system and the new regulations. And so those 54 hours, if somebody works for a centre-based system, their operator determines if they are able to use centre-based time to do that. There is no difference in the amount that is paid to the centre. And then in addition for people who are day home operators, they receive two training days, and they're able to use that time to complete the course should they wish, and that does not have an impact to their pay at all. So you've heard it here. People can use their two training days to complete that 54-hour course. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, that's a lot to cram into two days but it is better news than they've had before, so I look forward to speaking to them and see if that works.

The other thing that's not being provided is inclusive childcare for kids with special needs and learning disabilities. There's no funding available to them. I've spoken to the Minister about the SKIP program; it doesn't apply to day homes. They can't hire their own staff. They're sole operators. So how are we providing care for inclusive early childcare and education for these kids? Because they need it. They have doctors' notes, they can prove it to the department, but they're not getting help. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Member's absolutely right. The SKIP program is for centre-based learning. Home-based operators who have preschool aged children with specialized or individual needs are able to receive \$5,200, annually while the child is enrolled in the program, and that is the additional supports that ECE currently provides to day homes. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Great Slave.

QUESTION 478-20(1):

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY OBJECTIVES

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week the Premier tabled a document that was a return to an oral question that expands on the conversation question that I had with the Deputy Premier last October. The commitment was to provide a more detailed timeline on the work towards establishing functional zero goals for all communities. I got a reply but limited information on timelines.

So, Mr. Speaker, can the Deputy Premier tell me if we are on track to meet the homelessness strategy's goal outcome of goals set for each community to reduce homelessness by their own target of the end of 2025? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Madam Deputy Premier.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at this point there certainly has been some slippage in that timeline but it's owing, in part, due to some of the unanticipated challenges of truly working with the partners in this space. So I understand that there's significant efforts underway to work with NGOs and with Indigenous governments, community governments, others who are working collaboratively to ensure that the individual targets are appropriate to their communities so wanting to ensure that the ultimate timeline is aligned with the work that is

happening on the ground. And so with that, it's now clear that there may not be targets for every community in place by 2025. Work does continue towards that ultimate goal. Thank you.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that when updated timelines are available, they could be shared.

Mr. Speaker, I've heard that we need more data to support our applications for funding future transitional housing. Can the Deputy Speaker -- Deputy Premier please tell me if we have sufficient data to be seeking dollars both within Yellowknife and in our regions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that actually hits on what really is the biggest barrier right now in terms of being able to move this forward and with some timelines. Data is a challenge in this space.

I can say, Mr. Speaker, that there is support now flowing to non-government partners with respect to having a client management software system. So it's an actual system that can be used to better track and understand the challenge that is faced and how it's moving forward. So, again, there is significant work happening in this space, and it's collaborative work that's happening in this space. So hopefully with that, and as that moves forward, the data and then the timelines and the targets will continue to be advanced. And I'm pretty confident in saying that we can make sure that Members are updated accordingly. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Madam Deputy Premier. Final supplementary. Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering then, too I understand that there's work being done to get that data here in Yellowknife. There's work that is anticipated to get that data here in Inuvik this year. But with our smaller communities, our regional centres, I am curious is the Deputy Premier or the Premier, she's speaking for today, planning to bring these conversations forward with Council of Leaders to get that data from Indigenous governments? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Mr. Speaker, there is -- there's some very specific efforts already underway. Larger centres already had, in some cases, the capacity to move this forward. I will certainly be more than happy to bring back the suggestion that this go back to Council of Leaders if it hasn't already.

Mr. Speaker, there is some work, indeed, underway already in Fort Simpson and in Inuvik as well as Hay River. So, you know, again, happy to take this back and suggest that Council of Leaders be engaged, again, if they're not and to ensure that report is brought back to Members on that work. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 479-20(1):

MULTI-YEAR FUNDING AGREEMENT WITH DECHINTA CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND LEARNING

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

So the GNWT's multi-year funding agreement with Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning is set to expire in March 2025. So while most of Dechinta's funding has come from the federal level as well as private sources, GNWT funding is critical to show other donors and funders that the institution is critical to this territory, and a multi-year funding commitment is necessary to ensure Dechinta can actually secure its faculty staffing because professors would not agree to work on a month's notice year to year. So is the Minister working with Dechinta to set up a new multi-year funding agreement? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are working to achieve a new multi-year funding agreement before the end of this current fiscal year. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment has had a great working relationship with Dechinta over the last decade, includes currently the two-year contribution agreement which the Member is talking about which concludes at the end of this fiscal year. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, that's great news from the Minister.

Dechinta is also well placed to lead community-based research on both social and environmental themes but because it doesn't have official status as a private college, it's currently excluded from being eligible for research grants. So how is ECE supporting Dechinta's efforts to become a private college and be able to access those research grants? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start out with a huge shout out to Kelsey Wrightson, who is the executive director of Dechinta and is very active, and we have great meetings, and I love hearing about her vision. So the Post-secondary Education Act came into force in 2022, and this provides the foundation to build the new system. So through the act, a quality assurance system for the accreditation of certificate, diploma, and degree programs and institutions was created, and this includes the opportunity for designation as a private college. So staff with education, culture and employment meet with Dechinta on a regular basis and recurring basis to ensure they can pursue the appropriate recognition under that piece of legislation, and this work is currently underway. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So can the Minister clarify whether the establishment of Dechinta as a private college would require new legislation; and if so, how long would that take or what would be the timeline for that Act being introduced in this House? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can say that, yes, operating as a college requires that the institution be established in legislation. And as far as timelines, it really depends on how that work progresses and so I would love to report back on that progress to the Member. But currently, there is a quality assurance process that must be undertaken, and ECE is working closely with Dechinta through this process. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 480-20(1):
AURORA COLLEGE CLOSURE OF
COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRE

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today my questions are to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. What is the Department of ECE's preparations to retain the nine positions lost in the Sahtu because of the community learning centres' closures? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: From the Sahtu. Minister for Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to start off by recognizing that there is absolutely an impact to communities across the Northwest Territories and specifically the staff of the community learning centres across the Northwest Territories. However, under the Aurora College Act, Mr. Speaker, the board of governors is responsible for operations decisions of the college. I know that Aurora College is working closely with Department of Finance to support staff through the process and that elements of the staff retention process and policy have been communicated to potentially affected staff, and work is underway to find potential placements for those staff. Thank you.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm glad that job search is underway to assist the individuals. My second question there, Mr. Speaker, is what is the Department of ECE's position on the current learning centres' facilities or the buildings; what are the future plans of those assets? Mahsi.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are some community learning centres which are leased within communities and some where the infrastructure's owned by the GNWT. So in instances where it is leased by the Government of the Northwest Territories for the purpose of a CLC, the lease will be terminated. And in the instance where it is owned, we have been -- we have had outreach from Indigenous governments, communities, and organizations, and they've been in contact with both ECE and Aurora College, and they've let known what their interests are in some of those facilities. Now, of course, outreach has not happened for every single one of them. At the same time, though, Mr. Speaker, ECE does remain responsible for providing residents with access to quality programs and supports that enhance education and employment opportunities in the Northwest Territories. And so right now we're continuing to work with Aurora College to find out how adult learners will continue to be supported through the planned closures of the community learning centres.

I think it's also worth noting that through the Department of Infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, there are currently GNWT processes of how to deal with assets that may be vacated and no longer used for their traditional use. So right now at this point, we've got some learning and exploring to do, and then we do have contacts from people who have ideas of how they'd like to use those facilities. Thank you.

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

MR. McNEELY: Thank you to the Minister for that reply. I'm glad efforts are taken to make use of these facilities. I've been in a number of them, and they're ideal buildings for other uses.

So my last question: Will the Minister support a joint meeting between each Sahtu community leadership and the department so we can share the information updated and what the future plans are? Mahsi.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely to the Member's question, the answer is yes. I also have to say I've been really excited about some of the creative solutions that people are coming forward with for community learning centres. And I think that's part of our success story here, at the end of the day, is really looking creatively and at communities independently because everybody's needs are going to be different at the end of the day here. I also want to reflect, Mr. Speaker, on what the Member said as far as education being a lifelong journey, and I -- I'm certainly committed to joining the Member on that journey. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 481-20(1):
MEDICAL TRAVEL ACCOMMODATIONS
FOR MACKENZIE DELTA RESIDENTS

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ongoing concern of Quality Inn and patients having to be housed in this facility, it's been addressed by myself, my colleagues, the residents of the Northwest Territories, and the media. What is the Minister and her department doing to address this very important ongoing concern? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Mackenzie Delta. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker -- and thank you to the Member. You know, the issues with the boarding home, unfortunately, the increased travel that has happened, especially from the Beaufort Delta, I think in the last number it was almost 45, 50 percent increase in travel, which Keskorie who currently has the contract, their facility is unable to accommodate that. Even though they moved from that old facility to the new facility with more beds and more space, they still are unable to accommodate that. What

they are doing, though, and they have been, is working with other hotels and they've been successful trying to get rooms in more other hotels as needed when the overcapacity is happening, but this is ongoing work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been addressing this concern for quite some time, and it seems the Minister or department does not have the concrete answer. Maybe the answer's somewhere else; maybe it's in the communities or its residents. Will the Minister commit to follow suit with our neighboring territory Nunavut and take her department and hear the concerns of the communities and its residents of the Northwest Territories. Maybe the answer's out there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member. And this issue is not new. If you think about the last government, I probably raised this on an ongoing scenario as well. And that's why, you know, we are not just doing a medical travel policy review. We are doing a medical travel -- a review of how we move patients and what is needed and taking into account all of the things that the Member has raised, many Members in this House have raised. This government and past governments, I think the one thing that we didn't expect was the issues that are arising around dental and that increase around that. There is ongoing negotiations right now with the department -- or with ISC on ensuring that we are being able to provide dental to those residents and coming up with ways to bring dental services back into the communities. However, this is ongoing and so the work is continuing. And like I said, in the short fix is that we do have Keskorie working with other hotels in Yellowknife trying to secure more than just the hotel that they have been able to secure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll leave my third question out, and I'll go back to my second question I asked. The question is the Minister willing to take her department out to the communities and get feedback from the communities and its residents? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I do commit to doing this as I also -- you know, with part of this medical travel piece, we are working -- you know, this is a conversation that comes up with -- at the Council of Leaders. It comes up in bilaterals

with Indigenous governments. It comes up with constituents. So I have heard from many residents and these are all the things, as the Minister, that I'm taking in account while looking at the bigger -- the medical travel -- modernization of how we're moving patients in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 482-20(1):
PUBLIC SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES
FOR INDIGENOUS YOUTH

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Masi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to know what steps the government are taking to increase the number of Indigenous youth working for the GNWT in their home communities? Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's quite a number of things that -- different programs and services available. There's, of course, the Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Framework which is an overarching way of looking at how the GNWT engages with potential employees, communities. There's also a number of programs, not the least of which is Indigenous Career Gateway Program. This is an opportunity that was not fully subscribed just a few years ago when I had started here and is now very fully subscribed which is a certainly positive circumstance. But it's entry level positions where we can actually go out and bring people into the public service or training positions where someone may not have the formal qualifications on paper, but we can set up a training program so that a person can actually join the public service, be trained in on the job over the course of two years, and then gain an indeterminate position. And further, Mr. Speaker, there's, of course, all of the student assistance programs which don't reside entirely within Finance but, again, we are engaged with my colleague here and with the Department of ECE so that students who are part of SFA, which is open to ordinary residents of the Northwest Territories, have outreach from recruitment, from human resources, and similarly so they have recruitment to come back and join our summer student programs which, I believe, are going to be announced fairly soon, and that is a serious gateway that a lot of people come use to come into the public service. I'll leave it there for now, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Will the new Indigenous employment policy apply to internships and summer students employment program? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Mr. Speaker, just as the current affirmative action policy applies, so too will the Indigenous employment policy apply. And, Mr. Speaker, I can say anecdotally we do find that the bigger challenge is really bringing in students. We find often that students begin to go down the process and accept jobs more quickly than we can get to them. So it's more often than not that the students that are utilizing this are all getting scooped up which is, again, a good problem for us to have. We are looking, therefore, to have individuals who are members of the First Nations, Inuit, Metis people of the North having first priority and first access and, Mr. Speaker, again, we'll be continuing the outreach efforts that we undertake usually to students -- all students who are ordinary residents so that they are aware of these programs as soon as they come open again. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. Final supplementary. Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will an Indigenous young person from a small community like Gameti applying for GNWT jobs right out of high school have an advantage under this policy? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, yes, that is the expectation, is that an Indigenous person gets the advantage, an Indigenous person -- Indigenous to one of the member groups of the Northwest Territories does have -- would -- expected to have an advantage. And, Mr. Speaker, I take the comment earlier, I should acknowledge it with respect to some of the smaller communities we should be considering, and I'm happy to go back to the department and ensure, that, indeed, they -- students are aware of this program. The last plug I'll make is we also have the remote work policy. So, again, quite a lot of change, quite a lot of effort in the last few years to modernize our public service. Students, and in particular also residents in small communities, can consider applying and using the remote work policy so that they could potentially take a position outside their own community while still staying in their home community. So last comment on that, hopefully that also starts to see some uptake. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 483-20(1):
AURORA POLYTECHNIC TRANSITION
FUNDING

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I reiterated my concerns about what we're missing out on by not moving forward quickly enough with the polytechnic transition and, as such, I have questions for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

Mr. Speaker, why is our Minister not out championing the polytechnic transition and seeking funding to implement the facility's master plan? 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, I guess I should start off thanking Members for giving me this area here to champion the college on a regular basis here in the House. I do see transformation of Aurora College as an incredible opportunity for the territory because our students deserve to have quality access to great programs, and that is part of the transformation, is the programming as well.

Given the arm's length relationship with Aurora College, I have met with the board of governors on a regular basis and have reiterated to the chair, but also the entire board, that when they are ready, I am willing to go with them to Ottawa to advocate for additional funding. I am willing to support them in this endeavour.

I have also had conversations with southern counterparts and federal officials in regards to Aurora College and what they are looking for. I specifically have had conversations as well about student housing at Aurora College as that is one thing that was indicated to me by the board of governors as being their top priority right now for facilities for the college itself, specifically Breynat Hall down in Fort Smith. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am encouraged to hear about that information from the Minister. Some of those things are things that I wasn't aware of.

Mr. Speaker, is the Minister concerned, considering the news that came out about the Inuit Nunangat University recently, that the NWT is falling behind our neighbours, that is a competitive environment that the NWT wants to stay on top of; is the Minister concerned about

the progress that we are not yet making on moving this project forward? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I see what's happening in the Yukon and Nunavut as a positive for us because it means that there is heightened awareness and increase looking at education in the Arctic and education in the North and, specifically, in the territories. I see this as plowing the way for us and see this as being a great opportunity for us to continue down the path that we are on and eventually get to that point. 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, Mr. Speaker, the Minister in her response to my first question kind of alluded to the fact that she's waiting for some direction from the Aurora College board. Has she received any indication that this is going to be the year that we go out and start championing this project? I appreciate her saying that she's willing to go with them to Ottawa, that she's willing to go out, and I definitely think we need that kind of Team NWT approach since we like to talk about teams like Team Canada, but, Mr. Speaker, has she received any indication that that's happening and is she pushing that; are we going to see it this year? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, this work is already being done. I would say that it is not potentially conversations that are happening in public realms, but I can assure the Member that conversations around different avenues to access student housing are occurring with the board of governors, specifically with the chair and with the president. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 484-20(1):
WARDAIR FREIGHTER 1970
ABANDONMENT AND CLEANUP

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Lutselk'e Dene First Nation brought forward their concerns to my attention about the Wardair Bristol Freighter that crashed and sunk in the spring of 1970 just a few meters away from the shoreline. My question is to the Minister of ECC. Since Wardair no longer exists, who's ultimately responsible today to clean up this plane wreckage 55 years later; is

it the GNWT or the Government of Canada? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you much to the Member for the question. You know, as we talk about environmental liabilities -- and this certainly, from the description, sounds like an environmental liability of such in the North -- you know, there are many instances where these types of things have happened in the past that haven't been addressed and as we look forward to ways to address these, you know, it's certainly important that we work with all of our counterparts, including the federal government.

As to this specific instance, the Department of Environment and Climate Change has responsibility for spills that happen within communities, on highways, on public land. These types of events that happen in waterways would fall under the responsibility of the federal government and not the Government of the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister. Can the Minister of ECC commit to work with the Lutselk'e Dene First Nation and the Government of Canada to find the necessary resources needed to clean up this plane wreckage as soon as possible and also to do an assessment of the plane's wreck site. Thank you.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the department does work collaboratively with other agencies across the NWT, and we are also part of the NWT/Nunavut spill working group. So on many of these instances where we have these types of clean-ups that are required, you know, as a department we take our resources, we will reach out to the appropriate lead agency, which would depend depending on sort of the circumstance of the incident. And this event would likely fall under the federal government, and we're certainly willing to have the conversation with the Member's community and with the department and see what kind of resources we can talk about with the federal government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Final supplementary. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can also the Minister of ECC

commit to using this model as a way to looking for other wreckages in the Tu Nedhe riding? Right now as it is, this is just one of many that we're starting to hear, so I just want to see if we could continue to have that relationship with the Minister with our Indigenous governments. Thank you.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Department of Environment and Climate Change is also responsible for coordinating the 24-hour NWT/Nunavut Spill Line, and this is certainly a vehicle or an opportunity for communities or the general public to identify potential spills. And, you know, if you look at the definition of what is an environmental contamination, within the definition, it says that it's an unplanned release of a potential product that could harm the environment. So if there are these specific locations out on the landscape or in lakes or on our countryside, they can be identified as a potential spill certainly through that process which would allow us from the department perspective to engage with the communities or the public to make those assessments and then determine who the lead agency might be or what the potential path forward would be. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Colleagues, before we go any further, I've got a little note here that says can you please slow down and be respectful of our interpreters. It's simultaneous interpretation so it takes them a little bit of time. And I know you were passionate getting your message, whether it's the Minister or the Members, but please take your time and allow the interpreters to do their job as efficiently and effectively as they do. Thank you.

Oral questions. Member from the Deh Cho.

QUESTION 485-20(1):
MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS FOR THE
DEH CHO REGION

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister of Health and Social Services explain what mental health and counselling services are currently offered through the health and social services authority in the Deh Cho region? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Deh Cho. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, from the information that I have offhand is that there are community counsellors in Fort Providence. I mean, I can

say that the Deh Cho doesn't just necessarily draw the lines for the Member's jurisdiction but in there, Fort Simpson as well is where they have community counselling to service the residents of K'atloodzeeche, Kakisa, and for those other two communities that belong to the Member's riding. So they can contact either Fort Simpson or Fort Providence for those services.

I can follow up with the Member if there's anything further that health and social services provides. What I can also provide is that many of the communities in her riding also have applied, and are successful, of receiving the community wellness and recovery fund as well as the suicide prevention fund. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question was -- she just answered that. So how many residents from Fort Providence, Enterprise, and Kakisa currently access these services?

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that the data we do have, we'll have to go back to get specifics to her community if we have it. We might have it wrapped up in a regional, but I can get back to the Member on the four communities that she serves. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Member from the Deh Cho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had to reword the question. So which communities offer these services, and if the ones that don't have, like, the services right in the community, like Kakisa, can medical travel cover their travel to access these services? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, from my understanding, in those communities, that they can contact by phone, the services. I will have to get back to the Member on, you know, if there is possibility of them leaving or if there is a counsellor that travels into those communities. The level of detail that I have on hand, I don't have that information. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

QUESTION 486-20(1):

FEDERAL ENGAGEMENT ON DEFENCE
SPENDING IN NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Premier's

office, obviously the executive. And the Premier's away; I'll ask the Deputy Premier.

I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker, what level we are involved with Op Nanook as a government, but I'd like to ask the Deputy Premier if she can provide some information around the details with our ongoing engagement with Ottawa around the military spending in the High Arctic. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Boot Lake. Madam Deputy Premier.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, while Project Nanook is definitely one that centers on the department of defence and RJTFN, I can say that one of its aims is to help develop the interagency Crown Indigenous multinational partnerships intraoperabilities, so it is an opportunity for us to demonstrate our ability to work collaboratively at different levels and different degrees of government. And in that regard, Mr. Speaker, certainly, I'm confidently able to say the Premier does continue to speak regularly in the media, in the territorial address here, with respect to the work that's happening on engagement around military spending, military involvement in the Northwest Territories, and that this is being done, of course, with partnerships throughout departments and looking to Indigenous governments as well. Thank you.

MR. RODGERS: It's going to be a long day, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Does the Premier's office have dedicated staff that engage and prioritize Arctic security within the Department of the Executive? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, there's not a full-time dedicated position per se but, Mr. Speaker, the interagency engagement between the Premier's office and the federal government, that is a large part of the core work that happens at executive and Indigenous affairs, certainly on the executive side, so if you're in that department, I'm quite confident in saying, and believe I'm well placed to say so with the information I do have, that this is not a concern to the department, that they're confident that they are able to actively engage, and I do happen to know from the role that I'm in, Mr. Speaker, having made my own inquiries of late, that the deputy minister of EIA actually has just quite recently been involved and engaged with the deputy minister of Department of National Defence so those conversations are live and recent. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, madam Deputy Premier. Final supplementary. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Deputy Premier, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, given the heightened lens on Arctic security and sovereignty, given that Yukon has an Arctic security council now, and I know I believe we were invited to join that possibly -- and I wouldn't recommend we do. I recommend we start our own. So I guess what I'm looking for of the Premier's office is a commitment to report back to committee on those engagements on Arctic security and committing to researching -- setting up our own security council here in the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I understand the Premier has, in fact, offered to meet with committee to discuss in more depth the current -- I mean, obviously, currently in Washington, much is happening in the space related to sovereignty, and it would probably be a good place at that opportunity to discuss what a future opportunity might look like, and I will leave that to the other parties and to the Premier to complete that discussion. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 487-20(1):
TRANSITIONING FROM INCOME SUPPORT PROGRAM

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I noted in my Member's statement today about the income support program and how it provides the basic programs support and it does just very that, like exactly that, the basics. But I also cited concerns about the fact that it's not designed to empower individuals to not only stabilize but to get ahead and get back on their feet and back being productive members in their own way, whatever that's defined as, as productive members back into society.

Mr. Speaker, what can the Minister do to help change that attitude, perspective, and I'd say modus operandi, of the income assistance system to help empower people to get back on their feet, to get engaged in work, get into counselling, and get ahead. 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, that is a great question from the Member, and I want to warn

you that the answer is not very straightforward. So I'm going to start there, sorry.

Mr. Speaker, Education, Culture and Employment, through income assistance, does have client navigators. Those client navigators hold the role not only of assessing the basic needs of a client, as the Member said, of a resident, but they also can refer people to things like income assistance, career development officers, business development officers, etcetera. And some of the programs that the career development officers have at their fingertips in ECE which, by way, is right across the hallway here at headquarters, of everybody has access to, are things like the skills development program which is financial supports to help people participate in programming to upgrade or develop in essential employability skills. This is \$26,000 for up to 52 weeks. There is also student financial assistance. There's the wage subsidy program which funds employers to hire NWT residents with minimal work experience or education by offsetting the cost of hiring and training. This, Mr. Speaker, is up to \$30,000 in wage subsidies plus \$500 in special equipment costs. And then there's also the community training partnerships, and this empowers organizations to access financial support to deliver local activities aimed for the community to increase skill development, including workplace essential skills. And then there's also our wage subsidy programs, Mr. Speaker. So we do have a host of programs to support just exactly what the Member is speaking to. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Minister capturing the whole ECE budget, and I'm not sure there was a page left unspoken about. My question was nowhere near about any of -- most of that. I wouldn't say all of it, but I will say most of it. My question is really about the income support program specifically targeting to help individuals get through the system. They are data entry folks, not social workers. I've used the generic phrase navigator. Perhaps that's my fault, and I acknowledge that. Essentially I'm trying to say is what type of support does the income assistance offices, the clients who work with the people day-to-day, work to empower individuals to get them back regularly into the workforce, day-to-day process of living life and contributing? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Member is right; they're not social workers but they do a very good job at the work that they do and they're very committed to the work that they do. They are committed to making sure that they let residents know what opportunities there are

because there are other people in communities and other people within departments who do have things like access to the programs that I spoke about and who also have access to different workshops that are happening in communities. So, for example, Prosper NWT has delivered workshops to over 150 people last year. So there are numerous things happening in communities. And what some of these programs that I'm talking about also highlight is that there's other opportunities that are able to happen. But none of this work happens in a vacuum or with one person or even with the GNWT only. It really is all of community, and so that's why I really appreciated the Member bringing that up, is because it allowed me to highlight some of these programs that really are part of our success story. 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, again, perhaps it's a bad question in the sense of I'm not focusing in enough because what I'm finding is the income support workers -- at least we agree that they're not social workers. But, you know, it's not a system that encourages in a manner of making it part of the program to get them to seek counselling, get them to go to job fairs, get them to show productive choices. It's literally show up, drop your paperwork, and then you qualify. I'm saying let's turn that around by making it part of the income support or income assistance program that they must be involved in engagement because I find that people once they get into income support, they tend to have an extremely difficult time getting out of it. And I'm seeing nods around the room, Mr. Speaker. That's the type of counselling, social work, support network needs to be part of the program, not a good suggestion. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, some of the changes that were made in the last term, one of them was the removal of productive choices because it was found that people were often doing the same type of productive choice over and over again and wasn't necessarily leading to something that was helping people at the end of the day achieve their employment or education goals.

One of the changes, however, that was made was the ability of people to keep more earned income, encouraging people to go and pursue additional opportunities, but certainly prepared to have more conversations with members about productive choices or a variation of that

and the future of income assistance programs in the territory. Thank you.

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

Colleagues, I'm going to reiterate, I don't want preambles to go long, and I don't want your answers to go long. I understand these questions are important to both sides. Can we please be more succinct with your questions and that moving forward. Thank you.

Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 488-20(1):
INCOME AND TRAINING SUPPORTS FOR
DAY HOME OPERATORS

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, since I've asked my questions about day home operators, I've had some day home operators reach out to me. So they're wondering what numbers are being used to justify the assertion that day home operators earn higher income -- or higher aftertax income because they don't feel that way. So what numbers is the department using to come to this conclusion? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that information on hand and could not confirm that for the Member. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister work with day home operators through -- the department knows who they all are if they're registered day home operators -- to understand this concern more? Because it seems like there's a disconnect between the department and these operators. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Absolutely committed to working with day home operators.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. We're making good progress. Mr. Speaker, so finally, just on the training side, the training required for day home operators, the 55 hours, it's on a screen, it's a virtual program. That's hard for some people with different needs. There's no English -- or non-English language support or ESL supports in place. Can the Minister commit to working with those operators who have those disadvantage -- or those different abilities and work with them to find a better way to do this so

they're not at a disadvantage in completing this course work? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, ECE is certainly open to providing any additional supports that people need. This would be done on a case-by-case basis. ECE has not received any type of request at this point, and if people have a situation where they need additional supports I encourage them to reach out by emailing earlylearning@gov.nt.ca.

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

QUESTION 489-20(1):
CIVIC ADDRESSING FOR INGRAHAM TRAIL
RESIDENTS

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions now are for the Minister of MACA, Municipal and Community Affairs -- don't want to leave him out. One of the main initiatives identified by this government in business plans is civic addressing. And I understand that work is underway to assign civic addresses in small communities that don't have them, but my question is what is the plan to provide standardized addresses for the more than 400 residents living in unincorporated areas throughout the NWT, like along highways, including all of the residents living out on the Ingraham Trail east of Yellowknife? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

HON. VINCE MCKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Honoured to be here. I just wanted to say so with the incorporated areas that we have within the territories, of course it's hard to apply civic addresses. We are working with communities to do civic addresses; however, with the unincorporated areas there are some struggles, and there's some discussions happening amongst agencies. I know some of the addressing that's being used right now currently is kilometer markings on the highway system, and that's pretty common throughout the Northwest Territories. So currently, we don't have anything set for the area that the Member's speaking of, but there is discussion that is going on in the background to try to figure something out that would be something that could be used amongst all the agencies that are requiring them, like emergency services or the actual location themselves like those on the Ingraham Trail. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate the Minister acknowledging that this is needed for things like emergency services. Even, you know, deliveries of things like fuel, it becomes a huge problem when you can't specify where they're supposed to go. So I wasn't clear from that answer, is there a commitment from this government to address civic addressing for unincorporated residences? It sounds like there's discussions, but is there a commitment to figure it out by the end of this Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. VINCE MCKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we all know how we don't like commitments but I will work with the Member to see how we can -- to pursue with this. And I think it is an important issue, especially when you're dealing with emergency services. So I know there is conversations happening in the background; however, I don't know exactly where those are at. But I am willing to work with the Member and see what we can do for areas like those on the Ingraham Trail. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that, and I would flag too that there have been attempts in the past to put standardized addressing in place on the Ingraham Trail but there's been different systems that are now obsolete; it's almost worse than not having anything at all. So I appreciate that the Minister is committing to work on it. And I guess what I'm asking for is if the Minister could commit to join me meeting with constituents on the Ingraham Trail, this summer perhaps, to look at past systems and what their recommendations are for future systems that could work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. VINCE MCKAY: That is a very easy commitment for me, and I will say yes. But I would also add that there is some issues with just throwing out civic addressing. We do have other agencies we have to work with. And I know there's potentially some solutions out there so it's something we could probably, you know, have worked on pretty soon. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 490-20(1):
TERRITORIAL DEBT LIMIT AND FISCAL
SUSTAINABILITY

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we heard in the House, I believe yesterday, that the Minister said that if the sup passes and the budget passes, we will be \$3.2 million away from our debt wall if I heard her correctly and, of course, that is if I have my math correct. Mr. Speaker, that actually puts us at 99.8 percent of our overall debt limit. I'm asking the Minister of Finance: what is she doing to find new ways to operate budget -- sorry, operate the fiscal management of the Assembly and the territory at large that we can find ways to save money immediately such as let people work from home and other types of innovative ideas that can save the government money? Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the Assembly, the Assembly, of course, is managed by the board of management so I'll leave that to the operations of the board of management. With respect, more broadly, to the GNWT, Mr. Speaker, we certainly are -- of course that's why we introduced Restoring Balance as being an overarching strategy, fiscal strategy, for the government that would look for ways to reduce all expenditures and increase revenues.

Mr. Speaker, we did -- with respect to coming into the end of this fiscal year, we did ask the departments to consider carefully what kind of cash management and cash situation they have.

There is, of course, a difference, Mr. Speaker, between the total debt limit that we might be -- that we have and actually going near that on any given day. So perhaps I'll leave it there, Mr. Speaker. There's two more questions. I'll see what comes next. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, these strategies have yielded probably something, and I'll let the Minister explain what they have, but there's an enforcement perspective that doesn't seem to be there, including consequences. Mr. Speaker, how are we meeting these financial objectives without going over the wall, as they say, or hitting the financial wall? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we certainly have achieved some important markers. We are around \$106 million ahead of where we were at the start of this Assembly in terms of the revenues that we have either increased or expenditures that we've been able to find and reduce, and that is all the while, Mr. Speaker, remaining alive to the fact that this continues to be a challenging time

for residents, that there have been a number of unexpected needs. Again, low water is one that's well known, but also a wildfire season that still had a pretty significant cost associated to this last year, with one community evacuated and I believe others under monitoring. So notwithstanding those emergencies, we've achieved over \$100 million and change in terms of where we're at in our budgets. And, Mr. Speaker, we are still projecting to be able to pay for, I think, the first time, if I'm not mistaken, certainly since the 1999, the first time that we were paying for our full capital budget, projecting to do so this last year, projecting to do so into 2025-2026. So those are some pretty important achievements that we've had.

Mr. Speaker, departments do have variance monitoring that they each engage with that then goes to the Department of Finance and ultimately is coming to the financial management board so that we have a sense of where money is going at any given time. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, the -- you know, kudos to the paying for the full capital budget but keep in mind that, Mr. Speaker, that only works when you don't have the ability to borrow money anymore. So in other words, you can only spend the money you have. So the finance Minister's made it clear we have no more room on our borrowing.

So, Mr. Speaker, I guess I'm really getting at, at the end of the day here, my question is what is the Minister doing from a public discussion point of view about tabling ideas, how we can rework governments better and find more efficient ways to attract both a better financial bottom line and a better sound bottom line so we don't hit the wall, financial wall, that people are concerned about because this is a major stressor among the Northerners. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, Mr. Speaker, we did at the initial stage of having the Restoring Balance framework go out, and, again, it was the first time ever that a fiscal strategy for an Assembly was actually made public and was made the subject of a fairly public announcement, because we wanted to get feedback, wanted to get feedback particularly from public servants who are well placed often to know where efficiencies lie. We received an enormous amount of feedback, and we have continued to receive some feedback over the course of the last year. But, again, certainly always encourage people to bring ideas forward

through our departments and to their MLAs. Members of the public, too, were submitting ideas through that process. Mr. Speaker, I've -- we still have the red tape reduction working group that has a live email address and I often hear people say it's a great idea, but I'm not getting as many submissions there as I would like to see, although I think one may have just come in this morning.

So, Mr. Speaker, these are all avenues by which folks can submit their ideas and put ideas forward.

As I think I -- I had a fair bit of time yesterday, and I know I'm getting long, Mr. Speaker, we're -- I'm not -- we are -- we did increase or we sought to increase the borrowing limit from the federal government to increase that flexibility but, Mr. Speaker, we are still in a position where we -- we're not expecting to hit it this fiscal year. We are looking forward to the next fiscal year in terms of what we are -- we want to make sure we have some room, and we want to have that room because we want to achieve the priorities of this Assembly which are ones that look towards our future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Colleagues, our time for oral questions is up. Oral questions. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Relies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Tabling of documents. Minister of Finance.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 288-20(1):
2023-2024 PUBLIC ACCOUNTS, SECTIONS
1, 2, 3 AND 4

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: 2023-2024 Public Accounts, Sections 1, 2, 3, and 4. Thank you, Mr. Speaker

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. Good workout; I didn't think you needed one today.

Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Member from Yellowknife North.

Notices of Motion

MOTION 46-20(1):
EXTENDED ADJOURNMENT OF THE
HOUSE TO FEBRUARY 25, 2025

MS. MORGAN: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Thursday, February 13th, 2025, I will move the following motion:

I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Thebacha that notwithstanding rule 2.1, when this House adjourns on Thursday, February 13th, 2025, it shall be adjourned until Tuesday, February 25th, 2025.

And further that any time prior to February 25th, 2025, if the Speaker is satisfied after consultation with the executive and Members of the Legislative Assembly that the public interest requires that the House should meet at an earlier time during the adjournment, the Speaker may give notice and thereupon the House shall meet at the time stated in such notice and shall transact its business as it has been duly adjourned to that time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Notices of motion. Motions. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Minister of Finance.

First Reading of Bills

BILL 19:
SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT
(INFRASTRUCTURE EXPENDITURES), NO.
3, 2024-2025

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I wish to present to the House Bill 19, Supplementary Appropriation Act (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 3, 2024-2025, to be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. Pursuant to rule 8.2(3), Bill 19 is deemed to have first reading, is ready for second reading.

First reading of bills. Minister of Finance.

BILL 20:
SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT
(OPERATIONS EXPENDITURES AND
BORROWING AUTHORIZATION), NO. 2,
2024-2025

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I wish to present to the House Bill 20, Supplementary Appropriation Act (Operations Expenditures and Borrowing Authorization), No. 2, 2024-2025, to be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. Pursuant to rule 8.2(3), Bill 20 is deemed to have first reading and is ready for a second reading.

First reading of bills. Second reading of bills.
Minister of Finance.

Second Reading of Bills

BILL 19:
SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT
(INFRASTRUCTURE EXPENDITURES), NO.
3, 2024-2025,
CARRIED

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Thebacha, that Bill 19, Supplementary Appropriation Act (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 3, 2024-2025, be read for the second time.

This bill makes supplementary appropriations for infrastructure expenditures at the Government of the Northwest Territories for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. The motion is in order. To the principle of the bill.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion has passed.

---Carried

Second reading of bills. Minister of Finance.

BILL 20:
SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT
(OPERATIONS EXPENDITURES AND
BORROWING AUTHORIZATION), NO. 2,
2024-2025,
CARRIED

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes, that Bill 20: Supplementary Appropriation Act (Operations Expenditures and Borrowing Authorization), No. 2, 2024-2025, be read for the second time.

This bill makes the supplementary appropriations for operations expenditures and borrowing authorization for the Government of the Northwest Territories for the 2024-2025-fiscal year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. The motion is in order to. To the principle of the bill.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? The motion is passed.

---Carried

Second reading of bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, Tabled Document 275-20(1), with the Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, Department of Finance, February 11th, 2025.

Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates. We will now consider Department of Finance. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the committee wishes to consider Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates, Department of Finance. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. We'll take a short recess, 20 minutes, and we'll come back. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates. We will now consider the Department of Finance. Does the Minister of Finance wish to bring witnesses into the House?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Yes, please, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses into the chamber.

Would the Minister please introduce her witnesses.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have on my left Bill MacKay, the deputy minister of finance. And on my right, Tram Do, the director of shared corporate service.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. The committee has agreed to forego general comments on the Department of Finance. Does committee agree to proceed to the detail contained in the tabling of documents?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Agreed? Thank you. Committee, we will now defer the department summary and review the estimates by activity summary beginning with the directorate starting on page 162, information item on page 165. Are there any questions?

No further questions, please turn to page 163.

Finance, directorate, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$100,735,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to human resources beginning on page 166 with information items on page 168. Are there any questions from Members?

No further questions, please turn to page 167. Finance, human resources, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$23,651,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to management board secretariat beginning on page 169, information items on page 173. Are there any questions?

Seeing none. Okay, my eyes are -- okay, I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Oh no, thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Range Lake, sorry. Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: There's a lot of lakes over here. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'd like to talk about the carbon tax offsets, the cost of living, the COLO, the cost of living tax credit.

The last budget process, there was a commitment to revenue neutral carbon pricing regime. We do not see detailed itemization on how this revenue's reallocated to be revenue

neutral which is something that -- was a commitment last time. Why wasn't it -- why can't we find that in the main estimates, a revenue neutral carbon tax? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, appreciate the question. It won't necessarily show up as a line item here. The list of things that are being done within the GNWT right now to support carbon neutrality and environmental and climate change related initiatives are across departments, and so they wouldn't just show up right directly underneath this line item, but I can give some examples thereof.

We do have, for example, the cumulative impact monitoring that comes in around \$3 million. Alternative and renewable energy programs and alternative technologies program as in and around just over nearing \$300,000. Arctic Energy Alliance, 1.4. The offsets that go towards the Inuvik wind and battery program which was \$38 million. And another long list of items, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure -- happy to read it here or if the Member would prefer, we could certainly find a better way to do that. Consider, perhaps, either a letter to committee or some other fashion, but there's a long list of things that do total up -- more than total up the amount of income that we do receive from the carbon tax. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. I think the carbon tax report would probably be the best place for it. The issue was in that report previously, there's just been a line item for general revenue or a large -- anything that's not spoken for through the rebate programs is just revenue to the GNWT and then the argument is, well, the GNWT does lots of stuff that's related to climate so that's how we're doing. So it's, you know, dollar for dollar accounting of how it goes. I think the report would be the best place to do that. Can the Minister make that commitment? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I believe we certainly could make -- add a page to the report that comes out detailing the initiatives and different programs that are being spent in here. I anticipate that should be not a problem. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The carbon tax offsets have doubled in these estimates from the revised estimates. Can the Minister explain why that is. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The increase, Mr. Chair, is due firstly because the carbon tax rates are going up. There was an increase of \$15 per ton. And there was also, of course, the change in terms of the impact of having heating fuel removed which saw a significant change year over year. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. Shouldn't that make it go down, Mr. Chair? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: If I could direct it over to director of shared corporate services, Mr. Chair, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the director.

MS. TRAM DO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the budget is revised to be more in line with the actuals as the actuals came in higher than originally budgeted, and the addition of the diesel heating rebate approved in 2024 added to the expenditures. The COLO did reduce by a minor amount due to the addition of the home heating rebate. And also, we see an increase in the electricity rebate due to low water. I think there is no -- there is no carbon tax on diesel used to generate electricity. And then, in addition, we have community grant. A portion of the net carbon tax is sent to -- or shared with communities. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. So the increase then -- it sounds like the increase is solely due to the increased cost per ton, is that correct? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. To the Minister.

MS. TRAM DO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The increase is contributed to cost per ton, and it could also increase with the change in volume usage. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. Okay, so I mean hopefully this is a moot point because it seems like there's, again, movement federally to eliminate these. So what is the plan if there is a change to the policy direction from the federal government towards consumer carbon taxes, how will these numbers change? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. To the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we're certainly live to what's being said on the national stage by prospective future leaders of the country and what they may or may not do. Obviously, Mr. Chair, we certainly do want to be prepared to action a change if there is one, but it certainly hasn't happened yet, and the election hasn't been called as of yet. So what the outcome would be if we were to be in a situation where we're having to respond to the reduction on the carbon tax, there would be a net loss of income, revenue generation income, about \$11 million approximately. But that, Mr. Chair, is a pretty small amount overall in the grand scheme of the total revenues of the budget, so I certainly wouldn't want it to make it sound like that would be any kind of barrier. It would be a matter, if it needed to be done quickly, that we could certainly make decisions as an Assembly that that's a direction we want to go, and it can be done relatively quickly through a use of the regulations. But, again, at this point there just hasn't actually been an election called, so we have not taken any steps to make any changes that would bring us out of compliance with the current law. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: So just to confirm, the consumer carbon tax is worth \$11 million to this government? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Chair, I believe the \$11 million is for the total net revenue that we would have. I was just trying to pull the revenue numbers. I can confirm -- if I can, Mr. Chair, I will try to confirm quickly the portion that is only for consumer, but it would be less than that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. I guess, like, because there would -- I'm looking for gross I guess, or like, the total revenue, because the COLO won't exist either. If the consumer tax goes, there will be nothing to fund the COLO. So I assume that would be direction; maybe we'll confirm that. Will the carbon tax payout stop when the carbon tax revenues stop as well; are they going to be tied together? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Yes, that's correct, Mr. Chair. We're providing the cost of living offsets to offset the impacts of the tax. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: So \$11 million is not a lot in the grand scheme of things unless you're \$3.2 million away from your debt ceiling. So is the government prepared to lose this revenue -- how will this impact the DAT, the fiscal responsibility policy, the sustainability policy? Like, have we factored in this very likely scenario into our financial projections? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So there are contingencies built into the fiscal strategy. You know, for example, even just knowing around that there might be -- you know, going into collective agreement, bargaining, it's factored in. This -- yes, an \$11 million in revenue, I certainly don't want to understate that that would not be something to take lightly. At the same time, on, you know, a budget that is almost \$2.7 billion, that amount of revenue change overall is one that can be managed throughout the course of the year. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Okay. Finally, very quickly, does the government intend to maintain taxes on industry and rebates for industry? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, again, Mr. Chair, this is back to, as I suggested earlier, that not yet finally knowing, A, when an election will be called; and, B, who would be elected, when they would

be elected, and when they might make whatever changes they might make. The uncertainties that pile up with that, Mr. Chair, we're not going to be coming out right now and saying what we will or will not do other than to say that we'll remain in compliance at this time with the federal legislation, and, obviously, as that may vary, then we would be in a position to decide whether we want to vary ours. I mean, again, and the Member's mentioned this, that there may be some contenders who would say that they would remove the consumer portion and not the output-based system, whether the output-based system would be reasonable or relevant to us, again, to date, that's not been the response we've had from industry here. So, again, I -- and there may be variants to that -- those programs when somebody gets into office. So some unknowns but, again, happy to continue to brief on it with committee, happy to ensure that it does stay top of mind and that we monitor what different options we might be looking at. Again, I'm confident that given that it will be happening over the course of sometime and not instantly that we'll be able to manage that through the course of our fiscal year. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Next on my list I have is the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to pick up on one question before I go to the area I would like to explore. But one of the questions I think in my mind -- maybe it wasn't 100 percent clear, and perhaps it's -- I'll frame it this way: Is the department exploring options for a replacement carbon tax? Have they come up with scenarios or any type of framework if things change? Because I can't imagine the government sitting in complete absence of this in their mind and completely sitting on their hands while this is a live issue? So this is not more hypothetical. This is the fact that are they exploring options or in scenarios? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, again, Mr. Chair, the department does have folks who have been involved with the file and with the evolution of the federal carbon tax system for quite some time, since its early inception. They were able to respond when there were changes coming out from the federal government in the last couple of years, more than once, and those same individuals, Mr. Chair, continue to monitor what comments are being made. But until we know with some finality if we're dealing with no carbon tax, if we're dealing with a modified carbon tax, if

we're dealing with only an industrial tax, or if we're moving entirely to a cap and trade system, Mr. Chair, I'm not in a position to say what response we would have here. We would certainly want to, you know, again ensure that we are responding to the situation when we know what it actually is. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I find it kind of perplexing, and maybe the Minister can clarify if I'm misunderstanding her point, that if she's saying we're not doing anything until someone else does it first, that seems kind of odd especially considering the conversation is very live about nobody wants this carbon tax anymore, the department isn't developing scenarios as to what's next or preparing for it. So I'm trying to get a sense, are they developing any scenarios, or are they choosing to do nothing until someone does it to us? That's really what I'm getting at.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, Mr. Chair, I mean, I'm not going to ask the public service necessarily to run theoretical scenarios on things that may or may not happen in a space where they have previously done and been able to, you know, respond fairly quickly, that there's a lot of understanding within the department and our fiscal policy division of what the current circumstances are, what the current options are. They've had multiple conversations with the Department of Finance over the last couple of years every time there's been changes from the federal side. We have the option to zero out our values if it gets to a point where we are able to do that, and I would expect, again, as I've said before that that seems to be the tenor from this room that everyone would want that to be done, and we'd certainly keep folks apprised if it gets to that point. But as far as trying to figure out or read tea leaves of what -- who would get elected and whether they would actually do the snippets that are sometimes being put out as part of campaigns, which are not necessarily a full policy development, Mr. Chair, no, I'm not asking the public service to necessarily spend time trying to guess what that might look like. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I think that something that keeps getting lost in this conversation is it doesn't need an election

to make this change, just so you know. It's something that could happen on the fly, so hence, being prepared for whatever may come is really what I'm getting at.

So before I push off of this, I may return to this point of carbon tax, but my area of question next was going to be the heritage fund. And we can actually see the actuals for 2023-2024, just 3-point -- well, we'll call it \$3.1 million. I'm just using round numbers for sake -- but it's prescribed as 6.1 in the fiscal year that we're working through and the continuation of the same number moving forward. How real are these actual numbers, or are they just placeholders, and if -- thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the budgeted line item of \$6.1 million there has been that same value for -- well, some time anyways, but it is an estimate, and it is ultimately a projection, and it does depend a fair bit on what the state of the resource sector is doing and how healthy it is, and there can be quite a bit of fluctuation. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Given that I put, you know, say, great faith in the quality of work that probably goes into the budget, and I can't even begin to imagine how much skill and expertise it requires, other than the fact that I, you know, tip my hat to say I believe some very smart and hardworking people bring this together from top to bottom, page to page -- or cover to cover. But what worries me here is it's an estimate knowing that we're -- you know, is that really achievable especially when we're so close to the debt wall at \$3.2 million. Does estimates like this that have a lot of variability not have an impact at the end of the day on the overall budget and the financial wherewithal of the GNWT? So in other words, if you overstated your number to look -- make our balance sheet look better but is that really the case here? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, so no, we're not overstating the budget to make it all look better. It doesn't have that kind of effect on it, Mr. Chair. And perhaps given that this is getting into the process of how it is actually budgeted, I might start with the deputy minister but we

might turn to director of shared corporate services too. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

MR. BILL MCKAY: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't know if there's too much to add. So the \$6.1 million has been in place for some time. That was an estimate of what the royalties -- what would be going based on 25 percent royalties to the heritage fund over the course of the fiscal year so we kept that budgeted amount over the last few years, and then in the last few years, as the Member pointed out, the actual amount of revenues going in the heritage fund have been less, so that's what the situation is. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Do you want me to go to the director?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: No, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. All right, I'm going to go back to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And, by the way, I do recognize that a budget revenue is much different -- they're a different creature than the borrowing limit or the debt wall. But the thing is I'm looking at it from a bigger picture of the financial wherewithal so I'm just -- why do we keep saying \$6.1 million when we know that's the placeholder number but, you know, when we're so tight on the budget on every aspect of it, it just seems -- wouldn't it seem more prudent to budget it at 3.1 as an example, being more realistic? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, it actually might be interesting to look back on what the actuals in this area have been over a longer period of time. So the last couple of years, in particular, have been difficult for the mineral resource industry and things have been coming in low, but the value of \$6.1 million here is one that, again, do we want to look at this \$3 million? You know, we can certainly -- can certainly take it back. But, again, I'd want to look back at a longer stretch of time to have a better sense of just how much variability there is between the actuals and mains, and then also we'd want to probably go over to my friends at ITI and see if they can have a better sense of what the future might bring in this space and whether or not we are going to achieve that \$6.1 million. So I'll leave it there at the time, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I wouldn't want to prescribe the whole industry of either lawyers or accountants, but we all know they're cautious and pessimistic by trade so being optimistic on estimating financials seems to be so counterintuitive to the nature of lawyers and accountants, and I would just find it concerning because if they're not in touch with the issues of what's happening today, in other words, we're not -- you know, diamonds are down, gas is not coming out of the ground, oil's tapping out, people are not working, cost of living is going up, I mean, I just don't know how people would see these as realistic numbers and that's really the issue I'm trying to draw. I mean, we're not going to get anywhere kind of trying to pierrot back and forth saying, wow, we picked the numbers. But basing these on longer term trends, while I think the down trend has been it before years the only jurisdiction that is not showing economic promise is us in comparison to our two sister territories. So I'm just not sure -- back to the point of saying accountants and lawyers are very conservative. My apologies. Lawyers and accountants are very conservative, I was trying to say, in their budgeting estimates and predictions, and I just find it strange it seems overly optimistic, that's all. Thank you

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I take that as a comment, or was there a question to the Minister?

Okay, we'll just take that as a comment, then. Thank you for that. Next on my list I have is the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Since we are under the MBS category, I was curious to ask the Minister how MBS is going to support and action a macro economic policy and if there's any anticipated costs or if this is a role mainly for departments to take on. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I probably will turn that one to the deputy minister for some detail. There wouldn't be added cost, at least not anticipated at this time, Mr. Chair. It is -- you know, has been drafted, I believe has or will be going to committee for their consideration and -- before being implemented. It's a tool that's used to help bring a lens of understanding on some of the submissions that come through as decision papers to see whether or what impacts from a

macro economic lens things are having. But if I could, Mr. Chair, just on detail of sort of the next steps, I'll turn to the deputy minister.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

MR. BILL McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So as the Minister mentioned, the macro economic policy is -- framework policy is intended to give FMB the tools that it needs and the information that it needs to determine what the macro economic implications are, the decisions it makes. So the way MBS supports, and the Department of Finance supports, departments in doing that is that our fiscal policy division provides input into -- it's a series of questions that departments have to answer or fill out this questionnaire that will go into the MBS -- or, first of all, the department's submission, and then ultimately the MBS assessment of the FMB decision papers.

And then as far as where we are at in terms of implementing, we're revising the macro economic framework policy because it exists already but we're just updating it, and it's been sent to AOC on November 28th, so we're engaging with committee on it, and we'll have the revised macro economic policy in place sometime early this year, so sometime in the next few weeks. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So that's -- I can understand that. I can understand it's a lens that you put in decision papers, so thank you for that.

So historically, this division has supported the government renewal initiative. I know that they continue to, I believe, renew -- review these initiatives that come in from departments. I understand, too, that there's movement to eventually put that work back on departments and put that in their wheelhouse. But will GRI be used to support any ongoing fiscal sustainability objectives of the GNWT? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, yes, absolutely. Part -- a big part of the GRI work, and particularly with respect to the movement to have departments involved in doing and completing their first, second, and third rounds of evaluations under the GRI framework, is to create a culture whereby we are in a continuous evaluation, we are able to undertake and know that we are

undertaking reviews of our programs. That was not necessarily a very structured, organized, or enforced process prior to GRI. So by doing so, we are better placed going forward on programs, particularly -- well, I was going to say particularly new ones but there's quite a selection right now. So it really is an opportunity to bring that about so that there's a continuous culture that we are able to say is something working, is it getting value, and then all of us here have that information available to us to decide whether we want to continue to fund something or if you want to shift funding to something that's being particularly successful or shift funding away from something that's not succeeding as we all hope it to be. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so I guess to get a little granular -- and I apologize if this is -- this is just sort of spitballing, but is there a contemplation, then, that programs that undergo evaluation will be noted in future submissions to FMB? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we do get regular updates with respect to progress on GRI which at this point was involving the different -- different programs chosen by each department. We are providing training and supports through MBS over in fiscal -- our fiscal division over to departments to do that evaluation work in an ongoing way. And, yes, then that information goes through reviews is supposed to come back, each program evaluation comes back to the financial management board, Cabinet, and certainly happy to ensure that that's getting shared regularly. I believe it is getting shared regularly with committee but we can -- again, happy to make that commitment so that if or when it comes to this floor in terms of if there's program changes or if there's financing changes, we all have that information about what appears to be working versus not. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thanks, that's good to hear. And I guess I'll be a little more explicit. Is there a contemplation that the success of a program would be flagged specifically with an FMB submission such that the success or possibly areas for improvement would be a factor in the decision-making? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to say yes, but I just want to be clear that I -- to my understanding, there's not -- you know, in the decision papers, templates, which are in the financial administration manual, and actually are online, there wouldn't necessarily be a line item right now that says GRI compliant or GRI -- you know, has proceeded through GRI. I'm certainly happy to consider looking at that. So again, if there's benefit, that's a decision for more than just me sitting here right now. But if that's something that departments find helpful, if the analysts find helpful, yes, again, I'm a big fan of GRI -- I know the Member is as well -- so happy to look at ways to better include that culture evaluation in what we do. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I cede the rest of my time.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Next on my list I got is the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it. I certainly was going to ask questions very similar to the Member for Great Slave on GRI. Maybe if I can try and build upon that.

I mean, I think that the concern that I have about -- well, first of all, I mean, I think GRI is a great initiative. I very much support it. And my real concern with it is simply that we're not reviewing programs quickly enough, that it's been taken -- you know, it's kind of extended into multiple terms of the Assembly. And I think, you know, I've spoken to the fact in my reply to the budget address that our inability to say, you know, what the performance of any given program is and determine, you know, what's working, what isn't, what we need to adjust, is a big problem when it comes to budgeting.

So I guess what I would ask is, I mean, have we considered -- well, I'll ask kind of one at a time. Have we considered simply bringing in outside help to help us kind of move the GRI initiative forward in a faster manner given its importance to help us with reviewing all our different programs?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So to date at this point, this is being done internally. It was meant to be an exercise that didn't take on or didn't add costs to departments or include to the Department of Finance. So at this point, it's been largely cost

neutral or -- and certainly to get, as I said, not new money. Again, there's -- I think outside of finance -- I may be wrong -- I think only ECE has their own actual formal evaluators. So to do this in a bigger sense would likely require some additional funding. Again, could potentially get some estimates for the committee if they want to consider what that looks like. But, again, given the priorities of the Assembly right now, Mr. Chair, we're trying to keep this as an in-House financial. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I get the point, and I understand what the Minister is saying here, but I guess, you know, there's lot of initiatives that we spent a lot of money on year after year. This is one that could help us eventually figure out what programs we need to change or potentially even let go of. I think -- you know, I think this is kind of a -- one of those scenarios where we might need to spend a little bit of money to save some more. And, yeah, it's something that I'd like to -- I'd like to kind of run up the flagpole as an important initiative and I think something that could be useful for the difficult conversations that we've been having with, you know, our inability to fully implement the Restoring Balance policy as of yet. So I'll leave it at that.

Mr. Chair, I just want to ask -- I mean, I see that the heritage fund is included as an information item on page 181. I have some specific questions about that. Should I save those for that page or ask them here?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Now that you have the floor, we can also continue with that. Thank you.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I just wanted to ask a little bit about the heritage fund. In particular, I note that, you know, the Heritage Fund Act does require annual reporting, and we had a compelling presentation from a former Member of the Assembly yesterday on the heritage fund at SCOGO, and they were noting that we do not actually write or post annual reports as required. I'm just wondering why that hasn't been done.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: With respect to -- I did not have the opportunity to attend this briefing, Mr. Chair, so I don't know what may or may not have been said. But as far as reporting, Mr. Chair, maybe I'll turn that to the deputy minister to see if he can give that background, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

MR. BILL McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the department does currently -- or the fund does produce a report which the department does table on the heritage fund, and we also include in our reporting the heritage fund. So it's at page 181 of the main estimates for Finance. And that outlines where the revenues are coming from within the fund. So you'll see on that page that there's about \$61 million that is predicted to be in the fund by the end of this fiscal year that we're going into. And that outlines for Members and the public the amount that is -- of the income that is in that fund that is coming from interest and other income as well as the cost of commissions that -- and other fees that the fund has to pay to administer the fund. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, that's news to me, Mr. Chair, that the heritage fund annual report is tabled every year. I was under the impression that hasn't been happening and that they've been effectively relying on the public accounts for reporting. So can you just clarify for me -- I mean if an annual report, which follows the kind of rules and the final planning and accountability framework for annual reporting, you know, an auditor's report, management discussion and analysis, and -- yeah, analysis providing an overview of the previous year operations, how the year will influence decisions in the future, if that report has been tabled, if I can have a copy of it or I'll have a look for it, but I wasn't aware of it. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, no, just to be clear, it is tabled as part of when the public accounts are being tabled. I don't know that it is being tabled separately. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So -- and just to be clear, I mean, I would have to go and do an ask or have a look for myself, but does it follow all of the guidance in the planning and accountability framework that I just laid out there, or is it effectively just a few numbers in the public account?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I don't have the detail in front of me. I'm not sure if the deputy minister or director can speak to that level of detail. I'll turn to the deputy minister first, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

MR. BILL McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will have to get back to the Member on that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that's it for questions for this section at this time. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Next on my list I have is the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a few questions related to parts of the finance business plan, and I'm not sure where the best place to ask them is, but I'll just ask them here until I'm told I can't.

Okay, one is around -- there was a review of the vendor complaint policy which, I think, was supposed to be finished by last fall, unless I'm mistaken, and it was potentially related -- maybe you could confirm -- to the vendor performance management policy and so that, I believe, was intended to give departments and private industry tools to streamline accessing government services. Can you confirm, what is the status of that initiative and what the purpose of it is exactly? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the vendor performance management process is one whereby we do now, thankfully, monitor when there is commitments being made by a proponent to comply with BIP provisions so they get a bid adjustment and we, previous to this policy, had no actual mechanism of verifying whether they were performing as they said they were going to be performing. So that's that portion of it. And the element that was being reviewed is then if there's a complaints mechanism, so if a proponent says, you know, look, they're -- what you're saying I haven't done I've done, and having a mechanism by which to manage that, is what was under a review. And if I could turn to the deputy minister just on the -- where that is at, I'm not having it at the tip of my fingers. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Just for the translator, deputy minister, I'm not sure how -- if we -- the mic will come on for the Minister -- deputy minister. Okay, continue.

MR. BILL MCKAY: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. So as the Minister mentioned, the vendor complaint policy is part of a review of the procurement procedures, but that is a way for vendors to make complaints about specific awards of contracts, and it would involve review by a third party typically. So we're really -- start early on in that stage. We're doing a jurisdictional review to see what the best practices are in other jurisdictions, and -- but we're looking to include that within probably this fiscal year, have the vendor complaint policy for executive council consideration by the end of this year. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay. And can the Minister confirm, when you say end of this fiscal year, are we talking by March 2025 or the end of the 2025-2026 fiscal year? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you. March 2025. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. I look forward to seeing progress on that one.

Another question I had related to business plans was one of finance's goals is increasing awareness around the Indigenous development training program which is related to health care recruitment efforts, and it does say that the goal is to support seven employees per year in health related fields.

Can the Minister help increase our awareness of what exactly this training program does, like, what -- is it a certification or what it prepares people for and how it helps with health care recruitment? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the Indigenous development and training program supports professional development for Indigenous employees by giving skills training, work experience, depending upon what the circumstances might be. So there's what is provided as a grant from

the Department of Finance to help support employees through their departments to undertake these opportunities. We have a budget for up to 40 grants per year, and it's -- the number of applicants receiving funding supported by their departments has grown over the last few years. We are now as of, I believe last fiscal, sitting at 37 and -- or sorry, two years ago it was 37 and now we're -- in the last actuals we have as up to 62; and, applications, 59 moving forward through the process. So all of which is to say, Mr. Chair, it's an opportunity to ensure that employees who could benefit from some training in order to be able to move up in part of a succession planning have that access. I do have numbers by department in terms of who is accessing these funds and these opportunities, and I'd be happy to read out but also could easily certainly provide by way of letter to committee or as a tabled document. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So can the Minister clarify that this is not necessarily to recruit new employees but to take existing employees; and perhaps she can clarify if it's any employee throughout the GNWT if they're interested in some professional development related to health care or if it's only those employees who are already employed in health care and it's helping them sort of advance in their positions? Can the Minister just clarify those points. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. No, this is not health care specific though certainly does have some significant numbers, I believe, in -- or some numbers within health care of the folks accessing this. It is generally for staff -- existing staff was the other question. So it is for existing GNWT employees and is an opportunity means by which to support employees as they are wanting to move up in the organization by providing them, if there's a gap in a certification or a gap in a particular area, that they can obtain that through this program. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, that helps clarify. It is in the business plan under access to health care but now I understand that it's a broader program, but there's -- it's just mentioned there as something that might help our health care recruitment efforts as well. And perhaps I'll

follow up later with health and social services to see how well they're doing on health care recruitment. So that's all for now. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Next on my list I have is Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, like my colleague Mr. Morse, I'm referring to information item on page 181 which is the heritage fund and the amount that's in there. And I guess if I could start, Mr. Chair, if the Minister or deputy minister could provide a kind of a makeup of what's in that fund. And when I say makeup, with respect to the investment portfolio itself, equities versus treasury bills, bonds, other banking instruments. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I have as of March 31st of last year, so the actuals coming in from last fiscal, we have a breakdown of equity at 24.2 percent fixed income. Yields on bonds are at 9.8 percent fixed income. Short term, 54.5 percent. There's cash equivalence of just under 11 percent. And we do yet accrue interest at 5 -- .5 percent as well as dividends at a small marginal amount, 0.5 percent. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe I may have missed it. Did the Minister mention in that one what our annual yield was last fiscal year?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go back to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If that is the interest received, Mr. Chair, we had in 2023 -- I don't know that I have the -- well, I don't have the 2024-2025 actuals yet, Mr. Chair, but I can say we have revised upwards on interest. Obviously interest rates were pretty high last year, so -- and we do have -- so we have -- yes, we've revised it as of this time as being \$4.454 million. In 2023-2024, it was a lot lower but, again, interest rates were pretty high. So we do maintain right now a 75 percent bond amount and that -- so, I mean, again, depending on where those bonds are but when interest rates are higher, that, in this particular instance, did result in a higher than projected amount -- higher than budgeted amount. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, some of my colleagues have said we've had some briefing notes from -- at the government operations committee on the heritage fund, and we've had some experts come in and kind of compare us to other funds, not only in Canada but from around the world, and certainly to only have a 24 percent equity, while it's -- I understand it's public funds and certainly we want to be fairly risk adverse, but I do think that, you know, from what we've heard that's a fairly low amount to be in equities and likely we could see our fund do a little better if we were to take a little of that risk off. So I guess my question would be for the Minister, is the department looking at that, looking at working with our investment manager, current or any other, to look at rebalancing that portfolio to maybe take on -- to be a little less risk adverse, to look at kind of increasing our -- increasing the amount we receive annually. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the fund is actually -- this is a good time to ask that question, Mr. Chair. The act does require a review by the Assembly every ten years, and this Assembly happens to be the 10-year review period, so this is exactly the work that needs to be undertaken. I believe committee is actually responsible for the review, so happy to be part of that. I know that -- I gather that process is clearly underway, and I'm looking forward to seeing what may come of it, and certainly, that's -- the point is if there needs to be changes, there'll be changes. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you. Who manages the fund currently, Mr. Chair?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: CIBC, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And is there -- I'm assuming CIBC, being Wood Gundy, would be the manager of the firm managing the portfolio. And is there a specific,

then, oversight committee in the Department of Finance that also oversees the fund? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. No, not as an expressed committee per se.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure if the Minister's willing to do any commitments here today, but certainly I think it would be a good idea to have an investment committee made up of either Members of obviously the AOC and Members of executive to oversee the function of the fund manager to look at things like rebalancing the fund and how we want to invest that funding. So certainly something I would suggest, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am not going to make a commitment right now on the fly without, you know, a bit more discussion, but, again, happy to take back comments or suggestions that are going to come from the review. Again, I gather that is now underway. The Legislative Assembly's responsible for it. We can bring forward recommendations. It is something that is managed under the fiscal -- or the Department of Finance but is one that I know is of interest, and there are public obligations here, so before any significant changes would be made. So, again, happy to see what committee reports back on and see what we can do to hopefully increase the projections of revenues without undertaking too much risk. That's a long conversation. Again, happy to have it. I probably won't -- can't really say much more sitting here just now. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. And I'll go back to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I appreciate that. I appreciate the response so, Mr. Chair, I look forward to the outcome of this ten-year review and look forward to having an opportunity to participate through committee with recommendations for that review. Nothing further right now, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Next on my list I have is the Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. This has to do with human resources. According to the budget here, payroll, payroll tax, it decreased for 2025-2026 from 2024-2025 fiscal year. I just wanted to know because in here with the active positions, all across the regions there's going to be 33 positions that's going to decrease in all the regions, and even for Tlicho region, there's -- we're going to be down four positions. So I just wanted to know because payroll tax is down and it's not just GNWT that's, you know -- it's probably other organizations as well too. But with this, can the Minister tell us are these positions -- are they filled, or are they vacant positions?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Before I go to the Minister, this sounds like it's a human resource issue. I'm going to pass it on to the Minister because we passed that already, whether she wants to go ahead and answer this question. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'm sorry. I pulled up looking at payroll tax revenues that have -- we were getting in over the course of the year. With respect to human resources and active positions, the GNWT -- or sorry, the Department of Finance, we don't have change in the Tlicho region. We did break out Tlicho region this, and there's not changes within the Department of Finance for the Tlicho region. We're sitting at two full-time and we'll -- in the last year and continuing up to full-time next year. So there may be a page that I'm not seeing, and I'm happy to take that up and just go back to the Member to make sure that I'm not missing the connection that she's concerned about. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Before I go back to the Member from Monfwi, I just want to point out that we're on page 169 to page 173. Is there other further questions from the Member from Monfwi?

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: I know I saw that two positions that's with the Department of Finance, but there's going to be 33 positions cut, and I'm sure it's not just with the Department of Finance. It's probably for other departments as well.

The highest that I see here, you know, there's a South Slave and Delta, and Tlicho region is minus four. So it's probably with the other departments as well because South Slave correctional, but -- yeah, for -- so in Tlicho

region, there's minus four. You know, every job that comes to our community, our region, it's greatly needed. So I just wanted to ask the Minister so which department and where is this -- these four jobs are located? Because I represent four communities. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'll just go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, there was a number of reductions that are resulting from the impending phasing out of the Fort Smith facility, so that was -- would be the majority of reductions.

Mr. Chair, with respect to any position of reductions, again, there's none in the Department of Finance. There's -- I think there was a program sunseting that -- some federal dollars up in the Beaufort Delta, not GNWT money. I -- I'm just trying to -- we were just trying to all look for the overall GNWT department change because I don't recall there being a reduction in positions in the Tlicho. Again, I don't -- I have the Department of Finance only in front of me. So if there's a way to come back to the question I'm happy to do it, Mr. Chair, but I don't have any total department reductions for other departments in front of me.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Again, before I go back to the Member from Monfwi, I've been reminded that if we could just focus on page 169 to 173 and look at the key activities. I'm going back to the Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. So now since we're talking about jobs in -- or active positions here, and, you know, every position is important to all the regions to sustain the region. So I just wanted to ask the Minister right now, because she's with us here, so what work are they doing to move jobs to support regional employment? Some -- as decentralizations of program and services, is it on their budget for the next fiscal year? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So with respect to the Department of Finance, Mr. Chair, we are increasing positions in the Beaufort Delta and in the Sahtu to help support the FESS, or Financial and Employee Shared Services. And, you know, again, with respect to the broader GNWT, Mr. Chair, I mean, there's -- that's not an item that necessarily is under the priorities of the Assembly other than obviously wanting to, of course, ensure broadly the opportunity for

ongoing economic development and -- but, yes, so I don't have a new priority or a new mandate item that is relating to that.

From the perspective of human resources, lastly, Mr. Chair, there is, again, as I mentioned earlier, the remote work policy is one that we would certainly like to see ongoing and increased uptake of. So, again, employees can, from the point of potential recruitment and certainly early on in the process of considering a position, request to have it considered if they could be under the remote work policy which is -- for Northwest Territories based work allows people to work on a regional position or a headquarters position without leaving a small community. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Yeah, that's -- I have no more further questions regarding this topic. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from the Deh Cho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I didn't have a question.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Okay, thank you for that. That was the first round. Is there any Members that want to speak up for the first round that haven't spoken yet? Okay, I got a request now for -- to go to the second round. And I'm going to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I wanted to ask about the Northwest Territories child benefits. The limits are -- or when a family exceeds \$30,000, the benefit is reduced and then it's completely eliminated after \$80,000. Why is the limit set so low? Of course, the Canada Child Benefit is much higher and benefits a higher income bracket and has been a key instrument in reducing child poverty in this country, to the lowest it has ever been. And now I acknowledge that this benefit helps greatly. I was pleased to support increasing it in the 18th Assembly. But it still is quite low. And any increases to this, we're going to see direct benefits to reducing poverty in our communities. So what's the rationale for capping it at 80,000 or -- and starting to cap it at 30,000? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. To the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, that's the first time I've had that question asked of me in any setting. I don't

have an answer right now, and I'm happy to certainly take it back and likely confer with ECE who would have a role in ensuring that we are providing that kind of level of service to residents. So, again, happy to take that away and see if there is some room or opportunity to support residents differently or better. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Great. Well, I guess we could talk about it a bit more, but it's a very good benefit. You know, like, this is -- yeah, I would encourage the Minister to look at ways to increase it. These things are great. They -- you know, we're -- they -- they're going to benefit people staying in the North, in -- you know, taking the edge off the cost of living, and, you know, in particular in communities, smaller communities as well, that's money that's going in to help people pay for groceries, for school lunches, all that stuff. And this seems like a no-brainer to me because it's a really easy way to get money into people's pockets.

I'll ask about the cost of living tax credit as well. Is this benefit income tested? Thank you. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The cost of living tax credit is a line item available to all Northwest Territories residents. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. So is there a -- same question, I guess, around the calculation. Like, when's the last time we looked at this and to see if it's meeting the needs of northern families? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, first time I'm giving -- having received that question and certainly happy to see if there is an opportunity here to go back and look at how it is administered, what cutoffs there might be. You know, again, Mr. Chair, I don't have that level of detail here as being -- as it's under the grants and contributions detail. So, again, can't say a lot to it now. I didn't anticipate that this would be a subject of questions. So, again, happy to look at it if this is an opportunity. Again, certainly can take that away and give it a bit more work. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I would be happy to talk tax policy with the Minister of Finance. I am a big fan of how we can find ways to change our tax policy to incentivize investment in the Northwest Territories, to grow the financial services sector, and to keep people in the North. So if she's willing to have that conversation -- I mean, I think -- let me make it a direct question.

Is the Minister willing to look at this as part of her sustainability efforts and her department's efforts to raise revenue -- or sorry, well -- yeah, maybe -- well, yeah, let's say, like, as part of revenue options, as part of sustainability options, because tax policy could be a very powerful tool to, again, encourage investment and economic growth. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Tax policy is also a fairly complicated area so I'm not necessarily going to brainstorm here but appreciate the interest in the space. And absolutely, I, you know, had the benefit, a consensus system of sitting, myself and the Premier, with Members of -- all Members of committee last week and it was a positive conversation about these kinds of ideas and issues and would certainly be happy to have that type of conversation continue. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. How often does the department look at tax rates comparative to other northern -- or other Canadian jurisdictions? And, yeah, how often is that calculation done to make sure we're competitive with other jurisdictions? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: That we do regularly, Mr. Chair. So there -- and, again, happy to provide sort of as of January 30th, 2025, I do have a comparison of combined marginal personal income tax rates, retail sales tax, fuel tax, carbon tax, tobacco tax, payroll tax, corporate income tax, and taxes on financial institutions, which we don't have in the North. It's a full chart against all provinces and territories so, Mr. Chair, probably not something that you want me to read out here with four minutes on the clock, but I can provide it to all

Members and certainly consider having it put forward. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. No, I appreciate that. Again, I think these are discussions we should be having, and I'm glad we're having them. Brainstorming's probably not what I'm interested in doing on the floor either, but I think we have enough room here to move forward and find ways to work at either the standing committee level or individually as a Member, so I will leave it for that. But thank you for the Minister and her witnesses' time. Nothing further.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Were there any other further questions on round 2? I don't see none, I'm going to continue on.

No further questions, please turn to page 170. Finance management board, secretariat, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$149,795,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to the Office of the Chief Information Officer beginning on page 174 with information items on page 176. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the TSC sat in this program detail of the OCIO, and I know that TSC chargebacks affect the entire GNWT, and those chargebacks then turn around and fund the compensation for the people who work in the TSC. Could the Minister please clarify -- and if this is too granular, she can always get back to me -- the percentage that pays -- of the chargebacks that pays for compensation of staff, the percentage that pays for hard and software, etcetera, that we use in the government and what might be left over? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am definitely going to have to see if we can run that analysis. I suspect we can, but just breaking down, then, the number that you see here for this area and breaking it down in terms of technology services centre, how much of that is our staffing compensation and benefits versus others. So, again, certainly happy to provide that, and I think it does then get tabled to the House. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: That's all for now.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I see that there has been three positions added to the Office of the Chief Information Officer. And can the Minister confirm whether these are related to the transfer of the TSC from Infrastructure to Finance? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Sorry, Mr. Chair. Yes, they're for the transfer over. Thank you. They were previously -- yes, they were previously -- they were previously unfunded, showing as unfunded in Infrastructure, but they're being brought in and reflected for the fact that they were filled in or need to be filled. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay. And so it sounds like -- well, maybe the Minister can confirm whether any new hires were done as a result of the transfer of TSC and whether there was any net increase in staff. It sounds like there were unfunded staff, so I'm not clear whether they were counted previously in our budget documents as official staff positions. So I guess the couple questions related there are were there any new hires and was there any net increase in staff positions related to that transfer of TSC from Infrastructure to Finance. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Actually, Mr. Chair, if I might send that one over to our director, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the director.

MS. TRAM DO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The ten positions funded in the mains are the transfer from the Department of Infrastructure, and we have -- we show three positions but essentially they are now funded because the money for those positions were also transferred from INF but for reporting purposes, we had to show them as new positions. But they're not. They're just a strict transfer, and now they are funded

because the funds all transferred from INF. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So can the Minister just confirm, then, when positions exist but they're unfunded, do they or do they not show up in our budget documents as, you know, under these lists of active positions? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: to the deputy minister, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): I'll go to the deputy minister.

MR. BILL MCKAY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So when a position is -- well, it's just as the Member mentioned, we get a position that is unfunded but it doesn't come with the funding, so those three positions are unfunded positions. But in this case, the entire budget that was transferred included all of the -- both the funded and unfunded positions that came from Infrastructure. So to go to your specific question, when a position's unfunded, if position is established in the org chart but isn't an approved position by MBS so then it doesn't have funding attached to that position, so the department has to find funding within its overall budget so for -- within vacancies, other vacancies, to fund that unfunded position. So I hope that answers the question.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thanks. That does help to clarify but I just am still wanting clarity on the specific question of if it's unfunded, would it show up in the number in our budget of active positions? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the deputy minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: No, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay. Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. That's good for us to know going forward.

Another question I have that's related to the Office of the Chief Information Officer, I think,

so in the business plans there's multiple references to the CRTC and the importance of the CRTC or our relationship to it to support infrastructure advancement throughout the NWT, including needs coming from private industry. But can the Minister explain what is so important now about the CRTC in supporting infrastructure advancement or economic development or emergency management efforts? It's unclear in the business plans. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's a fairly big question; I'll try to be mindful of time.

With respect to infrastructure investment and funding, Mr. Chair, there are funds that CRTC does either administer or have some ability to influence. So, for instance, universal broadband fund in the last government was one which helped support the extension of the fibre into Whati. Another example, Mr. Chair, is current discussions around whether or not redundancy opportunities would be able to be funded from some of these sources. To date, they haven't been, but certainly for the North where we lack a lot of redundancy, we would like to see the opportunity to have redundancy as being something that receives the opportunity to seek federal funding and build up the resiliency of the networks in the North.

With respect to emergency management, Mr. Chair, again, this is -- you know, again looking -- well, also looking at what kind of funding is available under what circumstances for, for example, increasing cellular coverage over long distance highways, which is often an issue not only here but over large stretches of the northern parts of provinces, but in an emergency that could impact territorial evacuees in some circumstances. And, Mr. Chair, also creating accessibility of telecommunications both in terms of the affordability. There's recently been announcements that we are now participating in the Connecting Families program which we hadn't been, but we've been advocating for that for a long time. But also that there may be some form of subsidy coming in the hopefully not too distant future, again through CRTC. So quite a lot happens in this space with them.

Now, that said, Mr. Chair, they are an arm's length body. They are an entity that does also -- is a decision-making body. So it's not a Minister to Minister relationships, although there is a Minister responsible. I will stop there. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so just to clarify on that, does the CRTC offer any funding to us, or they're simply -- it's the way they regulate or their policies that impacts us and that's what we're engaging with them on? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So Mr. Chair, there's both. They do have funds that they are -- that they administer that can be accessed by project proponents but there's also significant policies that they have been working on over the last several years, namely, to have a new regulatory or policy approach for the North and that scenario where we have remained active in terms of ensuring our view of wanting to have a competitive industry but also one that provides reliability and affordability and trying to find that balance here in the North where we are -- obviously have comparably limited access to infrastructure. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, that's helpful to know. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): All right, thank you. Are there any further questions from Members? Seeing no further questions, please turn to page 175.

Finance, Office of the Chief Information Officer, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$30,906,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to the Office of the Comptroller General beginning on page 177 with information items on page 180. Are there any questions? Okay, I'm going to go to Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wish to direct my questions under the medical travel assistance program. It may not be solely in there so -- but I'm sure it's a good place to start.

I'm hearing from several GNWT employees about their medical travel and how their claims are not processed in a timely way. Does the

department have a standard outlined whereby it says, you know, within two weeks, you will be paid your submitted and obviously approved travel claim? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, there is a standard that we do try to meet. There are thousands of claims that are -- and requests for support that are processed every year. I do certainly get some BFs on this item that come through the office, particularly when there's been a challenge where someone has an appointment and they haven't received their information about where they might be going, a flight or hotel, so we do then try to very quickly make those connections. But overall, Mr. Chair, again, it's -- there's thousands that do get processed and that where folks are able to access their medical assistance. So, again, I wouldn't say that it's a -- that I'm being told it's a chronic problem at this point. Again, we do have service standards, and we are doing our best to meet them. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from YK Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: So what is the standard? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: I'll direct it to the deputy minister, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): I'll go to the deputy minister.

MR. BILL McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the standard for repayment is about 30 days -- is 30 days. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you. So that's the answer I was looking for, is 30 days.

Are you able to tell me through some type of analysis -- first, my anecdote, obviously, unless you brought it -- I doubt it, but I'd be pleased if you did -- how often is that 30-day threshold of the standard is run over; in other words more than 30 days? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we do, I believe, try to do

some monitoring of that, and I'm not sure if I have that in front of me. I'll see if the deputy minister or the director might, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Deputy minister.

MR. BILL MCKAY: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. So I don't have the statistics on hand with how many -- how often we meet that 30-day standard or don't meet that 30-day standard. But I would tell the Member that we are aware of issues with processing those claims on a timely basis or meeting that standard, and we have added two new benefits officers to help with the demand. So that's in this budget. And so we do believe that we will be improving our -- the number -- the amount of times we meet that standard. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: I would hope that there would be an offer somewhere to provide me the most current stats. I would ask that first question.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go back to the finance Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Happy to do that, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): I'll go back to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you. Can the Minister provide sort of like a bar graph on the size of claims; so in other words, a bar saying we have 300 employees who have claimed under a hundred dollars; we have had, say, 40 percent claimed by, you know, from \$100 to \$500, and 10 percent -- you know, however the math works in a bar graph. And the reason I say that is because to make sure it's not perceived as a useless exercise, which I'm not in favour of sending the department on wild goose chases just for my entertainment.

What I'm hearing from constituents and GNWT employees is we have several thousand dollars outstanding for more than 30 days, more than 60 days, some in the range of 90 days -- by the way, that's my next question -- is the fact that these people cannot afford to carry these types of costs. So I would -- as an MLA, I'm confident in sometimes saying no. Not always, but I'm -- you know, if somebody says to me, well, I've waited two weeks for \$10, I mean, like, I'd look at them and say, okay. But when I'm hearing people saying, I have \$2,000 or more dollars outstanding for three months, for some people that's a mortgage payment, some people that's more than a mortgage payment,

some people that is the difference between making a good go and a not. So that's -- so I'm going to start with the dollar value. And then followed by the second question is can we find out how many -- the averages of how many -- you know, how many people have waited for time. So in other words, two graphs, so we can get some good sense. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think we'll be able to provide that level of detail. I mean, I -- a little bit hesitant in that it's fairly specific numbers that were being proposed. But, again, we do track the 30-day mark. We do track how far behind we are on a 30-day mark of standard to provide refunds. And, yes, I believe we can break down what is owed individually, and I suppose -- let me leave it at that, Mr. Chair, and we'll see where we get. I also don't want to run into a situation where the breakdown results in it being identifiable if it's too particular and then we're identifying people who had medical travel. So we will provide a level of detail, and I have every confidence that the Member will let me know if it's not detailed enough. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go back to the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First I'll say I appreciate what sounds like an offer. I would say no, I don't want every detail, I want ranges, and I will leave it up to the competent people in Finance who can come up with some reasonable dates for ranges. I don't want every day as in this -- ten people waited one day, 200 people waited three days; that's a lot of work. But I would like to see, we'll call it responsible responses, and I'll leave it up to the department to say -- define days and define numbers. So that's two different separate pieces of information so I can look at it that way. So I'll start with that, and then I have another question. Just to reaffirm, I'm not asking for 50 payments or hundreds of pages. I'm literally looking for one or two pages of ranges. Thank you. Just to clarify.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, I -- it sounds like we can put something together without too much difficulty, so happy to make the commitment. And, really, go from what we were providing, you know, again, we want it to be useful. There's a large number of -- large volume of these requests, and they've gone up over the last few years so

they are adding some new officers. I do want folks to hear us saying that. It is a medical -- or it is a benefit for the public service and I know it's -- is one that's relied upon so want that message to be clear, but also there continues to be a lot of work in this space. So we'll -- yes, we'll make sure and get what I think is the ranges that are being requested. But I'm also -- I am happy to have a back and forth. If there's a little more we can provide to make this useful, I don't think there's any harm in saying that we'd be open to that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you. I'm sure we're going to find a middle here. And, again, I credit the competencies of the department so I have every belief that they'll provide responsible, useable information, and I want them to know I -- the next question is that -- what does the person do to action their claim?

So back to I know a few circumstances -- I don't need to go through every scenario but, you know, people are owed a lot of money for a lot of months. They call, nothing happens, and all of a sudden, you know -- yeah, like, why do we need political intervention for what should be an internal problem? And, frankly, that's how I view it. So what systems are being in place to help action these things? So in other words, if, by way of example -- I'm just trying to frame a context. So if a travel claim hasn't -- is showing up in the financial system -- I'm not connected to it, maybe I am, I don't know. It's not something I use. But regular day-to-day employees know how to use this system. They know where things are. I'm not using the right language because I don't use it. But I do know they can look it up and say something's been approved, it's processed. So if someone hasn't seen something actioned within two weeks, then who do they call? I don't want them to call their MLA. And I don't mean I don't want to hear from my constituents. But, I mean, what really should be an administrative manner without it personally feeling like they're pissing people off or stressing the system or making people angry or whatever you want to say. And then who do they call after four weeks that it's still pending into the nothing noted. And then we get into 8, and then we get into 12.

So Mr. Chairman, I'm trying to find out a good remedy for this particular situation and a way that we can have productive employees. Because if they're having a lot of money outstanding, it's quite stressful. And by the time they get to an MLA, we sign the consent form, we send to the department -- this is not a regular occurrence for me but the problem is it's

a process. It's a process. A process. And all of a sudden two more weeks are added to it. So what can the Minister do just to say help deal with the internal side of this challenge so it doesn't have to become a political one? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, Mr. Chair, there is, again, a very, very high volume of requests for medical travel support over the course of a year, and fortunately, most do not come to a political level. I do get a handful of BFs or inquiries from colleagues in this room through the course of the year. It's certainly -- but it is not -- it's not hundreds that I'm receiving. The vast thousands do go through a usual process and/or -- and even if there are problems -- and I'm not saying there's not problems that don't come to all of us, but that they are able to go through the usual processes. It's pretty operational, so I'm going to suggest this go to the deputy for kind of a step by step description that can hopefully help. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

MR. BILL MCKAY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, it's pretty straightforward. So the person that contacts you to arrange for the travel is your point of contact. So that's the person you should contact first. You can also escalate that to the director of FESS, so that's Financial Employee Shared Services, and, you know -- and then I guess you could take it to your MLA, but -- I agree with the Member that that shouldn't be the -- that shouldn't be the case, well, ever, but it should be very rare. So we will take -- we are aware of those concerns, and we will ensure through internal communications, that GNWT employees know how they can contact the government to get an update on the status of their repayment. So we'll take that back and think of a way of communicating that a little better. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to go -- I got one small, quick question from the Member from YK Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate my colleagues as well for this extra second. What would it take to bring it down to a -- say, a two-week standard as opposed to a 30-day standard? Again, recognizing that some of this is a lot of money, is there a way to practically do that just because of how much money can be outstanding for some people given -- well, I don't have to go at length, Mr. Chairman. That's only my question is, what

would it take for the department to do that? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Chair, I mean, I guess I'd have to start with the first question which was around getting the data of how far we are behind, if when we're behind, and what that sort of level of being behind is. I will put a plug in, Mr. Chair, that -- because, again, we want to make sure we're meeting our 30 days before we start to look at 14 days. If individuals, if staff know that they've gone for medical that they're going to have a particularly large incurrence, a particularly large impact from whether it's the nature -- length of travel, nature of treatment, whatever it might be, it is possible to do cash advances. And I've seen that certainly come through at times where, again, a person would go to their benefits officer and have a discussion around what the circumstances are and whether an advance is required or necessary and would certainly want to include or encourage people to consider that. Generally, it is paid upfront, but if -- again, if there's circumstances that are changing in their life or changing in the course of treatment, it is possible to get it in upfront and to have something advanced. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I got three more speakers. What we'll do is we'll take a five-minute break to give the translators a short break and then resume in about five minutes. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Order. We'll continue on. Next on my list I have is the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And pardon me, I have a little cough drop in my mouth.

I want to -- he's not here at the moment, but I want to thank the Member from Yellowknife Centre for raising all those questions just now. I would also like to talk about the GNWT medical travel assistance. I was hoping that finance could provide more details about the \$7.4 million increase, especially noting that last year's was a reduction from the 2023-2024 of approximately the same amount. So I'm just wondering why it's going back up. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, let me send that first to the deputy minister, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the deputy minister.

MR. BILL MCKAY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I might have to refer this to the director. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the director.

MS. TRAM DO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can you please repeat the question.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Certainly, not a problem. So in this year -- I'm looking at main estimate, page 178 -- the total estimate for medical travel assistance is \$20,232,000. In the main estimates of 2024-2025, it was at \$13,088,000. And then in the fiscal year prior to that, we have an amount of \$20,295,000. So it's kind of like a bouncing ball. It was high, it went back to -- it went down, and now it's back up again, and I was just wondering what the rationale for all of that was. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the director.

MS. TRAM DO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We did a kind of an estimate cost year to date, and it's right now at approximately \$17 million and we're not completing the year. The costs are mainly due to increased travel costs due to flight routes, overall increases in accommodations, and per diems due to changes in flight routes, and just increasing cost overall. And also we have an increase in the number of staff in the public service, so that also drives up the increase in the medical travel costs. So at three-quarters of the year, we're around \$17 million, so probably projected to the end of the year probably hitting around the \$20 million or more, similar to the medical travel of 2023-2024 number. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So just to clarify, the numbers that I have before me in 2024-2025 for main and revised estimates are no longer accurate? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's not that they're inaccurate. It's that at this point in time in the fiscal year, we don't have the actuals, so we are expecting or projecting right now that the year will end higher, closer to the \$20 million range, which is

where this year in the main estimates we have proposed to increase the budget to match closer to actuals from 2023-2024 closer to what we are projecting the ultimate number to be at the end of this fiscal year. Revised is done, I think, before, roughly in December, so -- I may be wrong on the timing on that. But it is not something that we had a final number for in time for print. But, yes, this year hoping to align this budget with what we expect the actuals to be. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you. So when would the projections for 2024-2025 have been completed in the sort of timeline of -- I'm just trying to piece together, like, you know, if it cost approximately this same amount in 2023-2024 in actuals which would have been, I guess, at the end of 2023-2024, we went downwards for our estimate. That's, I guess, my main question is why did we project downwards when we were facing \$7 million more in 2023-2024? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. To the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the previous amount of \$13 million is what the budget amount would have been. So back 2023-2024, likely you would have seen -- and I don't have it here or recall, but in 2023-2024 the actual budgeted amount, I believe, was significantly lower than what the actuals wound up being. You would see a change to revised if we brought a sup. In past years, we were, I know certainly in some years, able to cover internally increased costs in medical travel within the department. The last few years have seen a number of cost increases, not the least of which is an increased number of folks requiring medical travel, increased costs in flight costs. It's not an unfamiliar story to what we may hear soon from when our friends in health and social services appear and speak to medical travel more broadly but the cost drivers that they are experiencing also impact this piece within the Department of Finance. So with -- you know, again, if there's a sup that needs to be brought to cover the cost, you would see it in revised but if not, you wouldn't, but -- you know, and, again, we have now at this point sought to increase the main estimates to reflect the fact that costs seem to be staying -- are higher than what were being budgeted and are staying higher. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, I can appreciate that. I just -- I guess I'll stop there. I'm just -- I'm struggling with the concept of knowing that the costs were that much in 2023-2024 and then skewing back down. It doesn't make a lot of sense to me just as someone who sees, like, actual costs in my own budget. I realize a public government is different than a human being but it -- yeah, I'm still struggling with this. I don't know if the Minister has anything further to add.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. No, and, Mr. Chair, happy to spend a bit more time on it. I think this is actually an important -- quite an important concept that happens across different line items, and this is a good one to use as any.

So we -- the 2023-2024 number that you see there is actuals. We don't get that until much later in the budget cycle. Obviously, we're filing public accounts, you know, after the fact when the fiscal year is well over and we're already well into the next cycle, so the budget would have already been established in 2024-2025 and would have stayed at 13.088 unless we had, through this process, decided to increase the budget. So we wouldn't have had the actuals at the time of preparing the 2024-2025 Main Estimates.

A revised number happens, as we're seeing, you know, with the supplementary estimates that we dealt with earlier this week and starting in last week. Sometimes there's supplementary estimates that have only, you know, a specific one-time amount, but you may see that there are ongoing adjustments to a budget and then that can show up in, you know -- if there's a budget change, it would show up in the revised, and the -- sometimes it's a one-time change, but sometimes, again, then you can bring a forced growth submission which is when -- or other submission and you may see a change in the 2025-2026 estimates. Little time on the clock, so I'll stop there, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's helpful. I do want to touch on one other line item in the comptroller general, and it's a very dramatic swing but in the other way. It would be environmental liabilities which in 2023-2024 actuals were \$31 million approximately and now are down to \$2 million. Can the Minister tell the story or substantiate those numbers? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Chair, if I could start with the director -- the deputy, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the deputy minister.

MR. BILL McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the reason that the actuals for 2023-2024 are so much higher than our budgeted amounts for the year 2025-2026 is because we recorded several liabilities in that year. So I can list off which those are. So it was a Cameron Hills environmental liability, and that was about \$22 million. Norman Wells, there was an environmental liability there related to hydrocarbons and metals, and that was about an \$8 million liability. And then Fort Resolution, also underground historical pipeline, \$3.6 million. And then finally, Fort Simpson, there was a highway maintenance facility, so that's \$1.7 million. So that is why that's much higher than the other budgeted amounts. So we basically took a lot of liabilities that -- or took -- recorded those liabilities in that year, so that's why it went up so much. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to -- did you have a follow-up? Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Quite very grateful for that, Mr. Chair. Thank you. So can you explain how taking on a liability one year and the cost of that liability goes from a big cost to a not very big cost? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll start with the deputy.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the deputy minister.

MS. TRAM DO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The environmental liabilities are reported when we realize that it is a liability, and it's an estimate, so it is very hard to budget for what environmental liabilities exist until we discover that it is an existing liability. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Next on my list I have is the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, I appreciated the inquiries from the Member for Yellowknife Centre also. I just wanted to note that I, too, have a number of constituents who

have had difficulties in this area. So not to repeat any questions, but I did just want a clarification.

I believe I heard the Finance Minister say that she's added staff to this area that deals with this area. I'm hoping that the idea with that is that they are going to help to alleviate some of the burden and help to ensure that we're meeting that 30-day timeline more consistently. Is that -- can the Minister just confirm that and maybe tell us -- give us some details about that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, two staff are being added to FESS, so that is the division that supports public servants with -- including with medical travel assistance. And, you know, definitely the intent there being with two additional people on that that will be an opportunity to help ensure that people are having more timely assistance. You know, again, Mr. Chair, there's -- I will say there's also work happening in the Department of Health and Social Services. We do rely on referrals from them to come over to us, to FESS, and, you know, have had some conversations around wanting to ensure that there's no barriers between that process. So that is also in the works and, yeah, I'll just stop there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That is certainly good news, and it's something that I've been advocating for, mostly by email of course, outside of session, and so it is really nice to -- it is nice to hear that. I have some constituents that will be very pleased to hear about that so appreciate that information from the Minister and encourage the department to keep working with the department of health on coordination and certainly hope that those extra staff help to alleviate the burden a bit.

To turn back to the line of questioning that the Member for Great Slave brought up, that Cameron Hills information is interesting, and I appreciate that from staff. So can the Minister and her staff explain to me a little bit when we're talking about environmental liabilities, what are we referring to here? Are these liabilities that have come about for the government as the result of, you know, permanent operations from a company going into receivership and the department -- the government ends up having to take on that liability, or is there something

else going on here; is it related to government activity? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So it would be an estimate of what a clean-up might be. There is a statement within the financial administration manual here and under public accounting standards. I'll direct that to the director and see if she happens to have that one handy. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the director.

MS. TRAM DO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The environmental liabilities are a requirement under PSEVs for us to record an estimate into, I guess, the cost of potential environmental remediation or clean-up if it is a deemed a liability, if it is a liability that belongs to the government, if it's an asset that we own. And then once that liability's determined, then we have to book the estimate of the clean-up or the remediation and then it is treated with accounting standards that report it according to the present value of the future environmental remediation or clean-up for when that asset is either retired or when the clean-up is required. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I guess the next question for me -- I mean, I'll focus on the Cameron Hills one. Can the department explain for me kind of what exactly they're talking about there? Like, how did the department end up with a \$21.2 million environmental liability in Cameron Hills, and can they maybe explain to us a little bit, you know, how do we end up with a liability and is this something that the government's now responsible for and actively working to clean up? What is being captured under this \$21.2 million, the activity. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't have a detail, I don't believe, in terms of what -- like, specifically the kind of remediation that would be involved, like, the -- you know, for example, I know if it's -- yes, the specific type of remediation activity itself. Can certainly -- because that would be a lead that would sit over with ECC so happy to take that away and can provide a follow-up. The liability that we book is an estimate of what the cost would be but not necessarily the experts in

the Department of Finance that determine what the remediation costs itself would be, simply what we are accounting for it under the Office of the Comptroller General. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going back to the Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess, yeah, is the Minister able to provide us any detail, though, on like what exactly -- you know, it seems like the department has some information. They were able to give us kind of a high level idea Cameron Hills was \$21.2 million, but can we know kind of what project are we talking about? How did the government end up with this liability? I'm just seeking to understand a bit better, you know, something that just appears as a line item in a budget and, you know, once the narrative starts to emerge, one wants to know more about it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, some years ago, had a briefing note on Cameron Hills and how it wound up with us. I don't have that here now. The Department of Finance has the role of holding all of the costs, all of the budget for environmental liabilities as a total. Cameron Hills is one that went into a CCAA proceeding, and we then went out with the receiver to try to have it sold and if I recall, there may have been some activity in that space, some not, and I believe, again, that it was the receiver that did some of the estimates here in conjunction with ECC. But, really, beyond that level of detail, we, again, as the Department of Finance under, because we have the risk management portfolio, hold this liability. We also hold other -- you know, so we hold that as a -- or as the budget item, but, again, the details of what would be involved is not going to be one that our folks would be best place to speak to. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to ask the same question about the Norman Wells. What in Norman Wells is costing us \$8 million?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, there are sites along the Canol Trail that we have some responsibility for. There are other sites that are still with the

federal government, but this is some -- a liability for the sites that are already transferred over to the GNWT. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My understanding of anything related to Canol is those would have been federal contaminated sites. I'm just curious how the GNWT ended up with them.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The GNWT only has a portion of the Canol Trail, actually in fact I think a fairly small portion of the Canol Trail. The majority is still sitting with the federal government. And the last time I was updated on this there was some ongoing conversations with the federal government seeking to have them bring their portions up to a level so that this could, frankly, be an area that may well have a future tourism opportunity. But at this point, the majority of the trail is still federal responsibility. We have our smaller, much smaller portion of it.

I would say, Mr. Chair, there is a dashboard that was created, I think kind of late in the last government, and a bit of a plug for our Office of Chief Information Officer that we've just gone through. So I would refer to that environmental liabilities dashboard. Hopefully people can Google it, it's available online, and it would break down some of this information with the granular detail coming from other departments that I don't have for -- from the main estimates right now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly I'm looking forward to checking that dashboard out. If the Minister wants to shoot me a message on Teams or email, I'd love to have a link to that. And, yeah, I have a lot of curiosity around this item, but I'm out of time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from the Deh Cho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was looking at that clock, and I thought maybe we were out of time from asking more questions. But anyways, NWT power, territorial power subsidy program. It says it's for all the NWT communities outside of Yellowknife? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. For all of the thermal communities; in other words, communities that rely on exclusive diesel generation for power supply. They are brought down to the power rate that is in Yellowknife so it does -- it would benefit -- yes, it brings the power rates down for those communities. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Deh Cho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Can the Minister tell me how much -- so I guess it would vary by community so -- or is it zones or districts that say? Because I'm not sure which communities -- I know Fort Providence still runs on diesel. So how much are we being subsidized, do you know, in Fort Providence? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe I have seen charts setting out specifically what each community does get for the territorial power support program. I don't have it here. I don't think we're pulling it up quite quickly. I'm more than happy to provide that, Mr. Chair, so that folks do know exactly the difference between what they would pay versus what they are benefitting here. It is -- in fact, I think it's on the Northwest Territories Power Corporation website. And, again, I can certainly -- I'll make sure that we provide a link so that that information can be had. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Deh Cho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Okay, that's the questions I -- because Yellowknife doesn't -- I think that's about it. That's what I wanted to know, was how much was it subsidized and I didn't realize it was, because it just said subsidy program so. That's fine, if the Minister will get me the information. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Is there any further questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the amount for short-term interest, it's budgeted at \$6.1 million, and that's the same amount that was budgeted for in the 2024-2025 mains, but then the revised amount was -- well, getting close to twice that amount, over \$11 million, and the 2023-2024 actuals were almost \$20 million. Does the Minister feel that the budgeted amount is realistic for this coming fiscal year

especially given the increased pressures and indication that we're going to have to increase our borrowing limit going forward? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. So this is an area that may well see a need to have a budget increase between now and 2025-2026, although that said, the last couple of years have had particularly high interest rates, and they only just came down not in time. If I recall correctly, we came down to our low -- it was only over the summer -- so if rates remain -- if interest rates remain low, we may well find that we can return back to a lower number, although we do now have an increased in short-term debt so there's a couple of things to be balancing in there. And if we can move -- you know, again, that's where a few years ago, you may -- well, folks may be aware that we moved some short-term debt to long-term debt because it secured it in at a lower rate. So a few different factors here. Again, I do anticipate this is a number that we need to look at because, yes, obviously in 2023-2024, extremely high rates, and even 2024-2025, although a little more manageable, still high. So I guess those are some of the factors, and I'll leave it there for the moment. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, I appreciate those insights, and I'll be watching closely to where our interest levels end up.

I wanted to ask about the number of active positions. We have budgeted now an increase in seven active positions. I know the Minister mentioned that two are -- two new positions are allocated to the Financial and Employee Shared Services, the FESS. I do note that the new positions, five of them are for headquarters, and two are somewhere in the regional offices. Can the Minister explain why these new positions are needed or what they'll be doing? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So there's a benefits officer being added in Inuvik and a benefits officer being added in Norman Wells. In addition to that, in the payroll office, there's a payroll clerk and payroll officer. That's four. And then with that in addition, one additional payroll supervisor on there and that, in part, is growth in terms of the

number of staff and public servants that folks are monitoring.

And, Mr. Chair, before people ask me about whether the growth in public service is driving this, it's not purely or just singularly public service alone; there's also the contractors that these folks provide supports for. So it's not just the indeterminate officers or indeterminate workers but a much wider range of supports that they provide to anyone that they are issuing any form of payroll to. So, again, as I'm saying our contractors and locums and so on and so forth. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I mean, it is a bit of a wicked problem in some ways in that, you know, we need more staff to monitor the more staff that we're taking on. So it just is an added reminder that adding new positions has a broader sort of ripple effect on government finances than just those specific positions and the cost of those but in the other additional positions that we need to then help take care of those new positions. So I can understand how that is the case but just something we need to think about carefully with fiscal sustainability measures going forward. That's all for me. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Any further questions? No further questions, please turn to page 178.

Finance, Office of the Comptroller General, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$102,808,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, committee. We're going to stop for a 20-minute break. We'll resume, and we'll continue on. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, so the committee wants to continue on, and we will.

Moving on, thank you. There are additional information items on page 181 to 186. Are there any questions?

Thank you, Members. Please return now to the department summary found on page 159 with information items on page 160 to 161. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions, committee, I will now call the departmental summary. Finance, operations expenditures,

total department, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$407,895,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

COMMITTEE MOTION 73-20(1):
TABLED DOCUMENT 275-20(1): 2025-2026
MAIN ESTIMATES – DEFERRAL OF
DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE,
CARRIED

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I move that this committee defer further consideration of the 2025-2026 Main Estimates for the Department of Finance at this time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. The motion is in order. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion carried.

---Carried

Consideration of the Department of Finance, operations expenditure, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, total department is deferred.

What is the wish of the committee? I'll go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

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

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. The motion is in order. The motion is non-debatable. All those in favour? All those opposed? Motion carried. I will now rise and report progress. Thank you.

---Carried

We're going to go eat and you guys can stay. Anyways, Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses from the chambers.

MR. SPEAKER: Report of Committee of the Whole. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. EDJERICON: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 275-20(1) and would like to report progress, one motion carried, and, Mr. Speaker, I move that report of the committee of

the whole be concurred with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Can I have a seconder to the motion. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Close, but Inuvik Boot Lake. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? Okay, motion passed.

---Carried

Report of Committee of the Whole. Third reading of bills. Minister of Finance.

Third Reading of Bills

BILL 19:
SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT
(INFRASTRUCTURE EXPENDITURES),
NO. 3, 2024-2025,
CARRIED

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Thebacha, that Bill 19, Supplementary Appropriation Act (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 3, 2024-2025, be read for the third time. Mr. Speaker, I would request a recorded vote. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. The motion in order. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. The Member from Yellowknife South has requested a recorded vote. All those in favour, please stand.

RECORDED VOTE

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu): The Member for Yellowknife South. The Member for Kam Lake. The Member for Hay River South. The Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. The Member for Nunakput. The Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. The Member for Deh Cho. The Member for Sahtu. The Member for Yellowknife Centre. The Member for Range Lake. The Member for Inuvik Boot Lake. The Member for Monfwi. The Member for Frame Lake. The Member for Great Slave. The Member for Mackenzie Delta. The Member for Yellowknife North. The Member for Thebacha.

MR. SPEAKER: All those opposed, please stand. All those abstaining, please stand.

17 in favour, zero opposed, zero abstentions. The motion is carried. Bill 19 has had its third reading of bills.

---Carried

Third reading of bills. Minister of Finance.

BILL 20:
SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT
(OPERATIONS EXPENDITURES AND
BORROWING AUTHORIZATION), NO. 2,
2024-2025,
CARRIED

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes, that Bill 20, Supplementary Appropriation Act (Operations Expenditures and Borrowing Authorization), No. 2, 2024-2025, be read for the third time. Mr. Speaker, I would request a recorded vote. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. The motion is in order. To the motion. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's rare that we speak to routine business of supply such as supplementary estimates but in this case, I feel compelled to raise a protest to our continued pattern of expenditures well exceeding our revenues despite things like the fiscal strategy put in place to control them. We continue to fail to meet our targets. The messaging is very mixed in public and in this House as to whether or not we have a very solid foundation for our finances or one that's incredibly shaky, and I think that confusion resonates outside of this institution as well.

So I said when we debated these in the Committee of the Whole that I wasn't going to write any blank cheques to the government on this one, and I intend to keep my word on that one. We went through the detail of that document and many -- you know, probed the questions that needed to be -- answer the questions that needed to be -- or asked the questions that needed to be asked and ultimately reviewed that spending but, at the same time, as substantiated as it is, it still represents significant overruns from where the main estimates put the government's proposed spending, especially around health care. And now we have new information on hand where appropriations for health care are being approved before we actually see the budget, and perhaps that's why we see these overruns.

We have a lot of work to do in this Assembly to get our fiscal house in order. I've listened, I've heard clearly from our Finance Minister that that needs to be a goal that's priority. In fact, I urged this government to make it a priority of the 20th Assembly. And that unfortunately was not the case. So we were spending an inordinate amount of time talking about this and -- because it is a -- or it is -- there's a great

need, but it not being a political priority makes it much more difficult to address because it has to take a backseat to everything else we do and this is what I mean about the confusion. You know, we need -- we have four priorities and fiscal restraint is not one of them, and it should be, because it is increasingly becoming a topic of subject and debate in this House.

So all that being said, I do not feel like I can support this budget at this time until we have clarity on our fiscal priorities and a real plan to get our finances in order. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. To the motion. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Similarly, I want to say, and independently -- I want to stress that as well. I've come to similar conclusions that I'm worried about the overall foundation we're building. First of all, we didn't -- Members at large weren't involved in the edict issued over a year ago saying this is how we're going to control and manage our finances, and now we hear how close we are to our debt wall. It sends a weird message back to we have spending freezes, but it doesn't sound like we have the authorities to follow through on them. They're just suggestions. It's not that I don't think the Minister's trying, the bureaucracy's trying, but eventually someone's going to have to just try harder by sending that type of clear direction by saying we cannot get all of what we want this time around, and we have to wait.

I mean, this government has the essence, as I was speaking to some people on the weekend, their perception is is that it's funded largely on the good will of our future, and I worry that debt will become the solution to our future. And even when we heard about expanding the debt limit, you know, we hear the message of we don't have a plan for it, we just want it, and we want it to back our future. But my view is it's not good debt. If I'd gone to the bank and said I just want more debt potential, they'd be saying, and? And so if they said if you were buying something of infrastructure such as a highway, such as a Taltson expansion, something that created tangible investments and good results, you know, it would make sound sense.

Anyway, I am going to vote against this, and hence I just wanted to put it officially on record. And I did speak to it in Committee of the Whole as well, but I don't see any reason to go too long at length. I've already made my point. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. The Member from Yellowknife South has asked for a recorded vote. All those in favour, please stand.

RECORDED VOTE

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu): The Member for Yellowknife South. The Member for Kam Lake. The Member for Hay River South. The Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. The Member for Nunakput. The Member from Deh Cho. The Member from Sahtu. The Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. The Member from Monfwi. The Member for Frame Lake. The Member for Great Slave. The Member for Mackenzie Delta. The Member for Yellowknife North. The Member for Thebacha.

MR. SPEAKER: All those opposed, please stand.

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu): The Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. The Member for Yellowknife Centre. The Member for Range Lake.

MR. SPEAKER: All those abstaining, please stand.

14 in favour, 3 opposed, zero abstentions. The motion is carried.

---Carried

Bill 20 has had its third reading.

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

Orders of the Day

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu): Orders of the day for Wednesday, February 12th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer or Reflection
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
 - Oral Question 475-20(1), Budgeting Process for Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Replies to the Budget Address (Day 5 of 7)

7. Acknowledgements
 8. Oral Questions
 9. Written Questions
 10. Returns to Written Questions
 11. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
 12. Petitions
 13. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
 14. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
 15. Tabling of Documents
 16. Notices of Motion
 17. Motions
 18. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
 19. First Reading of Bills
 20. Second Reading of Bills
 21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates
 22. Report of Committee of the Whole
 23. Third Reading of Bills
 24. Orders of the Day
- MR. SPEAKER:** Well done, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Wednesday, February 12th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.
- ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 6:20 p.m.