



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES  
**LEGISLATIVE  
ASSEMBLY**

**1<sup>st</sup> Session**

**Day 55**

**20<sup>th</sup> Assembly**

**HANSARD**

**Thursday, March 13, 2025**

Pages 2261 - 2330

**The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker**

# Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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

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**YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES****Thursday, March 13, 2025****Members Present**

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

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

**Prayer or Reflection**

---Prayer or reflection

**SPEAKER (HON. SHANE THOMPSON):**

Please be seated. I'd like to thank Jonas Lafferty for the opening prayers for today's session. Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for WSCC.

**Ministers' Statement**

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 119-20(1):  
THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKPLACE  
SAFETY

**HON. VINCE MCKAY:** Mr. Speaker, today, I would like to address a topic that is fundamental to the well-being of all workers across the Northwest Territories; the critical importance of improving workplace safety. Ensuring that our workplaces are safe is essential for the health, productivity, and prosperity of our communities.

When workplaces are safe, everybody benefits. Safe workplaces result in fewer injuries and improved productivity. Most importantly, making the safety of workers a top priority helps to preserve lives and protect families, while also ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Workers' Protection Fund. As Members know, the Worker's Protection Fund, ensures coverage of current and future claims costs and stable assessment rates for employers.

As part of efforts to improve safety outcomes across the territory, I am pleased to announce the upcoming release of a new Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission's Safety Planning Guide for employers, which will be launched this May during Safety and Health Week. While each workplace has unique needs and challenges when it comes to safety planning; there is no one size fits all approach; there are key elements that every workplace safety program must include by law. This guide will provide clear, practical tools and resources to assist employers to create or improve their safety programs, ensuring they meet the required standards for:

- Documenting inspections and incident investigations;
- Establishing safe work procedures that protect workers from job-specific risks; and,
- Conducting hazard assessments to evaluate and mitigate potential dangers in the workplace.

Additionally, I am pleased to announce that this summer, the occupational health and safety funding program will open for applications. Through this new program, the WSCC will provide funding opportunities for providers of occupational health and safety services whose work aims to improve access to safety education and supports employers in complying with occupational health and safety legislation.

As part of supporting WSCC's commitment to improving workplace safety through strengthening regulations, I recently appointed 14 members to the Safety Advisory Committee and the Mine Occupational Health and Safety Legislative Committee. These committees provide industry expertise about the frontline impacts and applications of the Safety Act and Mine Health and Safety Act. I look forward in 2025 and 2026 to seeing the recommendations of these committees to ensure the Northwest Territories is a safer place for workers, and ensure our legislation aligns with good practices and standards of safety across Canada. This will help address emerging risks and break down barriers for industries across provincial and territorial borders.

Mr. Speaker, improving workplace safety is a shared responsibility. As we approach the National Day of Mourning on April 28, let us all reflect on our collective responsibility to protect the lives of those who work in the communities and renew our resolve to prevent further workplace tragedies and ensure that all workers return home safely at the end of each day. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for WSCC. Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Housing NWT.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 120-20(1):  
PARTNERSHIPS IN HOUSING: LOCAL  
HOUSING ORGANIZATIONS

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Mr. Speaker, I am proud of Housing NWT's successful partnerships. Housing NWT works with Indigenous governments, the federal government, non-governmental organizations, municipal and community governments, and industry, to support more homes for Northerners across the Northwest Territories.

Today, I want to highlight Housing NWT's relationship with an important, but often overlooked group of frontline workers, who deserve recognition: The dedicated staff of our local housing organizations.

If you are from a small community, you already know who they are and what they do. Local housing organizations are the property managers and skilled tradespeople who ensure tenants have a safe and secure place to live. Across the Northwest Territories, 24 of the 33 communities have local housing organizations. While local housing organizations are agents of Housing NWT, they are governed by their own board of directors. This allows the LHOs to make decisions that best serve their communities, as they have a deep understanding of their community's needs and challenges. Yet, their role involves so much more.

Increasingly, local housing organizations are playing a vital role in community safety. Not only do their staff ensure that housing units meet safety standards, including fire regulations and structural integrity, they also collaborate with the RCMP to address illegal activities in public housing and expedite the related eviction process when necessary. This partnership helps manage illegal activities and ensures tenant safety, emphasizing a shared commitment to community well-being. While evictions are always a last resort, they are sometimes necessary. Additionally, local housing organizations play a vital role in emergency preparedness as demonstrated during the unprecedented and devastating floods, fires, and the pandemic of the past five years.

Mr. Speaker, the health and well-being of our residents is paramount to the work we do in this House. I have set a goal to work towards eliminating smoking in Housing NWT owned homes, which has received broad support from the housing forum and the 19th Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Social Development.

Eliminating smoking in our owned units will have positive health outcome for our residents and reduce asset damage. Smoking will not be permitted in all new buildings and in any new or amended leases for existing public housing and market rentals. This week, Housing NWT will begin engaging with LHOs on how this work can be implemented in a staged approach across all Housing NWT owned units, including public housing and market rentals. It is time for us to join all the other jurisdictions in Canada by eliminating smoking in our owned social housing units.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize that Housing NWT and LHOs serve vulnerable populations. Ensuring that our residents have access to safe, affordable, and adequate housing is a fundamental aspect of reconciliation and social justice. The LHOs work diligently within their means, and it is up to Housing NWT and our partners to deliver the infrastructure that their communities need. I am grateful for the dedicated staff of our local housing organizations and want to recognize their challenging and critical work. Quyanainni, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for housing NWT. Ministers' statements. Minister for Health and Social Services.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 121-20(1):  
LONG-TERM CARE

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to making long-term care accessible for seniors and elders whose needs can no longer be met at home. We recognize the importance of helping residents remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible. However, when home and community care services are no longer enough, long-term care plays an important role in providing necessary support.

We continue to enhance home and community care services so Northwest Territories residents receive the support they need to stay safe and as healthy as possible at home. At the same time, we must also plan for the future of long-term care in the Northwest Territories. That is why we are aligning our capital investments in new long-term care facilities with updated bed projections from the Northwest Territories bureau of statistics that are expected this spring. These projections will help meet the needs of our aging population now and in the years ahead.

Mr. Speaker, we have taken significant steps to improve long-term care capacity in the territory. The opening of Liwego'ati Building in

Yellowknife is a major achievement. This modern, integrated health and social services facility strengthens our ability to provide high quality care to Northerners. It includes a primary care clinic, outpatient rehabilitation services, extended care, and long-term care beds, creating a campus of care that better meets the needs of residents.

Liwego'ati provides 16 extended care beds and 74 long-term care beds which will be opened in a phased approach. In January of this year, we began admitting individuals to the 17 beds opened in phase one. These beds are helping to reduce wait times and improve access to care for those who need it most.

Mr. Speaker, as we expand long-term care, we must also invest in our workforce. Investments in Aurora College's personal support worker and practical nurse programs are critical to developing a workforce of skilled health professionals to meet the needs of long-term care facilities across the territory.

We are also strengthening the admission process. We continue to use the territorial admissions committee, which reviews all long-term care applications to promote fair and consistent access. The Department of Health and Social Services manages the long-term care wait list and works closely with all health and social services authorities to support smooth transitions for residents.

To further improve quality, we have introduced new long-term care standards last month. These standards reflect the best practices from across Canada and promote culturally safe, dignified, and respectful care.

Mr. Speaker, supporting seniors as they age is a responsibility we take seriously. By aligning our investments with future needs, expanding long-term care capacity, strengthening the workforce, and maintaining high standards of care, we are building a system that will support our aging population for years to come. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Ministers' statements. Minister of ITI.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 122-20(1):  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES CRITICAL  
MINERALS PRIORITIES AND ADVANCED  
PROJECTS UPDATE

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Mr. Speaker, we have great rocks. The global demand for critical minerals continues to grow, and the Northwest Territories is well-positioned to play a key role in supplying these essential resources to

Canada and its allies. With over two-thirds of the critical minerals listed by Canada, and almost half identified by the United States, our territory is a significant contributor to securing a stable and responsible supply of materials vital to clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and digital technologies.

Recognizing the opportunity before us, the Government of the Northwest Territories outlined four key priority areas for critical minerals development:

First, increasing public awareness about the importance of critical minerals. By incorporating critical minerals into educational programs and industry outreach initiatives, like NWT Mining Week and Mining Matters, we are ensuring that residents, including youth, understand the opportunities this sector presents.

Second, attracting investors and industry leaders through participation in key industry events like the Yellowknife Geoscience Forum, Roundup in Vancouver, and the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada conference in Toronto, and our targeted promotional campaigns such as the newly announced federal investment of up to \$420,000 to the governments of Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut to support Invest North of 60.

Invest North of 60 is a collaborative project between the territorial governments to attract investment and strengthen the growth of the mining sector in the North through strategic promotional activities at leading industry events to actively position the NWT as a premier jurisdiction for responsible resource development.

Third, investing in geoscience and regulatory improvements to provide investors with the certainty they need to move projects forward. By applying new technologies to unexplored or under-mapped areas, we are strengthening our knowledge base and improving our ability to support mineral exploration and development. In addition, we are exploring the concept of a collaboration office; a place where GNWT departments, land and water boards, and the federal government could offer a one-stop shop so proponents can have better wrap-around support to pathfinding through our regulatory processes.

Finally, building and strengthening relationships with Indigenous governments, industry, and the federal government. Through initiatives like the regional energy and resource table, the Mackenzie Valley operation dialogue, and the collaborative efforts at key mining events, we are working collaboratively to

streamline regulatory processes, develop infrastructure, and create an environment where responsible development can thrive.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to highlight several advanced critical minerals projects in the Northwest Territories that are making impressive strides.

The Pine Point Project has the cleanest zinc concentrate globally and is moving closer to becoming a reality, with investors showing strong interest. This project represents a significant opportunity to supply vital materials for clean energy and other industries.

The Prairie Creek Project stands out as the highest-grade unmined zinc deposit that has already attracted substantial federal investment in transportation infrastructure. This investment represents a big win for our economy and Canada's critical minerals strategy.

The NICO Project, which has the largest primary cobalt deposit in the western world, as well as one million ounces of gold, is another prime example of our mineral potential. With financial support from both Canada and the United States, this project will put the Northwest Territories front and center in North America's critical minerals supply chain.

The Nechalacho Project is putting the Northwest Territories on the map as Canada's first rare earth mine. These rare earth elements are key to defence, electronics, and clean energy technology technologies.

Lastly, the Mactung Project is one of the largest and highest-grade known tungsten deposits on the planet. With funding secured through the U.S. Defence Production Act, this project underscores how important the Northwest Territories is for supporting supply chains in North America.

Mr. Speaker, these projects, along with growing exploration for lithium and other critical minerals, show that the NWT is an attractive destination for responsible resource development. But to make the most of these opportunities, we must tackle a few challenges. Improving regulatory efficiency, expanding strategic infrastructure, and ensuring our workforce has the skills to support this industry are essential. That is why our government continues to work closely with our federal partners, Indigenous governments, and industry leaders to push for more geoscience funding, closing the infrastructure gap with southern Canada, and targeted incentives such as the North of 60 mineral exploration tax credit.

Mr. Speaker, critical minerals are more than an economic opportunity for the Northwest

Territories; they are key to Canada's national security and long-term prosperity. By attracting investment, strengthening partnerships, and promoting responsible development, we are creating new opportunities for a strong future for our residents, our economy, and the generations to come. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of ITI. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife North.

### Members' Statements

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT 605-20(1): COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

**MS. MORGAN:** Mr. Speaker, collective bargaining often ends up being a big fight. It pits employer against employee. It's seen as a zero-sum game where one side wins and one side loses. It's assumed that what the employer wants, in this case the GNWT, is to pay its staff as little as possible and get away with treating them badly. This assumption results in a very adversarial and confrontational process of collective bargaining. But what if we didn't assume that what the GNWT wants and what employees want is so different or so far apart? What if the GNWT and staff both have strong common interests, like effectively recruiting and retaining staff?

There's a different less adversarial model of collective bargaining called interest-based negotiation, and it's currently one of the key asks of the NWT Medical Association. The idea is to start bargaining discussions by finding all the areas of common ground and by focusing on the outcomes that everyone wants - ultimately a better health care system. Many doctors are not interested in simply getting paid more if it comes at the cost of patient safety or if it requires cutting corners in terms of quality of care.

The NWT Medical Association is also proposing that Indigenous leadership be included at the negotiation table with the physicians and the health authority, and that would be a first in Canada, in order to keep the focus on what kind of care NWT communities need and deserve. And this is coming from a group of essential workers who do not have the option of going on strike. Clearly, they see that their bargaining power comes from a focus on the public's best interest. I'm curious as to whether the Union of Northern Workers or the NWT Teachers' Association would similarly consider the interest-based negotiation model. This has already been used successfully to negotiate physician contracts in Prince Edward



Island and Nova Scotia where it was reportedly a profoundly healing process leading to better collaboration between government and physicians overall.

The NWTNA believes that interest-based negotiation is the best way to keep patients at the heart of the process, find efficiencies, drive costs lower, and heal the relationship between physicians and the health authority. I call on the GNWT and the health authority to agree to meet physicians and Indigenous leaders at the table using this progressive approach in a spirit of reconciliation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 606-20(1):  
ROLE OF RCMP IN THE NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES

**MR. TESTART:** Mr. Speaker, the RCMP is a key partner in keeping our North safe and secure because the role they play in our territory is incredibly different than how they operate in southern jurisdictions. We rely on the RCMP for many services they would not offer in any province because for most communities, they're the only police around thus they play a greater role here as first responders, search and rescue personnel, and are essential to fighting drug crime. So embedded are RCMP officers in our communities that they serve, they're always warmly welcomed and adopted as one of our own.

The pivotal role RCMP plays in our territory is longstanding because the RCMP was established specifically to operate across Canada's frontier to enforce sovereignty against encroaching American interests and the early settlers who disregarded treaty provisions and disrupted hunting and trapping practices of individual communities. In fact, the RCMP were initially designated as a Northwest Mounted Police, reflecting their responsibilities over the vast stretches of Canada's west which were once a part of the modernday NWT. Later, they turned their focus towards bootleggers and outlaws evolving from horseback to snowmobile and to familiar vehicles we see around driving on our streets today.

This week, we learned that the outgoing Prime Minister is suddenly looking to dramatically reform the RCMP away from day-to-day policing towards high-level crime such as intelligence gathering and national security. These proposed reforms could put an end to the crucial work the RCMP provide in the NWT and Canada's North by limiting their resources and scaling back the services they provide to

our territory. The RCMP has indicated that if these changes go through, as service agreements expire in the coming years the NWT may have to switch to a new policing model, but it's very unclear what that will look like and how our territory will have the capacity to take on a greater policing responsibility.

I hope that the Premier is as alarmed as I am and, indeed, the RCMP is, because they don't want to pull back from the work that they've done to keep us safe. Now that we've been underfunding the RCMP for years, changing their mandate isn't going to work for the North. We need a united front to keep the RCMP in our communities, in our territories, and in Canada's North to protect our communities, ensure our sovereignty, and fight violent predators that are encroaching in our communities, Mr. Speaker. And this new mandate threatens to undo that, and I hope the Premier agrees with me that it cannot stand. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 607-20(1):  
WELCOME TO ASTRONAUT COL. JEREMY  
HANSEN

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the visitor of Canadian Space Agency astronaut Colonel Jeremy Hansen to Yellowknife and celebrate both his work to advance Canada's contribution to space exploration and his dedication to inspiring our youth, our educators, and all, indeed, northerners who dream of technology, science, and innovation.

Colonel Hansen is a highly respected astronaut with the Canadian Space Agency, will make history as the first Canadian set to participate in a lunar mission. His role is the Artemis II mission which will take humans around the moon for the first time in 50 years, demonstrates Canada leadership in space exploration. Yet, despite all his hard work, he still makes time to meet with youth across the country and all this week, I'm excited to say that he stopped by several of my communities as well.

During his visit, Colonel Hansen has visited with the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and presented at the school in Dettah and N'dilo as well the high school in Yellowknife. Today he's just wrapped up a visit to Lutselk'e Dene First Nation and will conclude his tour with a public event at the Prince of Wales Heritage Centre this evening at 6 p.m.

Certainly alongside his passion for space exploration, Colonel Hansen's personal mission is to share his experience in aerospace, science, and leadership with students and educators and community members across Canada. He emphasizes the importance of STEM education as a pathway to exciting careers, including those in space exploration. I know his message to our youth will prove to them that with dedication and perseverance, even the most ambitious dreams are possible.

Mr. Speaker, our youth in the North have limited potential but they need role models and opportunities to help them reach their goals. Colonel Hansen's visit is a reminder that the sky is not the limit; it's just the beginning.

On behalf of the people of the Northwest Territories and my colleagues, I want to thank Colonel Jeremy Hansen and the Canadian Space Agency for visiting our communities and inspiring the next generation of leaders in science and exploration. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Members' statements. Member from the Sahtu.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 608-20(1):  
MARINE TRANSPORTATION SERVICES  
2025 RESUPPLY FOR SAHTU  
COMMUNITIES

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the winter snowfall has not been at levels we had hoped. I fear the Sahtu will suffer the same disastrous low water levels that forced Marine Transport Services to halt all shipping to Sahtu like previous summers.

The communities of the Sahtu rely heavily on our winter road system and summer marine transportation for essential supplies. When either of these critical transportation networks fail, our communities face costly consequences. Mr. Speaker, what happens if we cannot complete all scheduled deliveries before the winter road closes? What happens if winter water levels this summer prevent barges from reaching our communities? Airlift of fuel and goods last year was not a plan. It was a last resort which came with astronomical costs.

Mr. Speaker, I am calling on the Minister of Infrastructure to present a detailed contingency plan for the Sahtu region that addresses potential summer marine transportation challenges. The correspondence between community leaders, government officials, and myself highlights the urgent need for proactive measures. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, this brings

us to the Sahtu region and the Mackenzie Valley Highway. Inspirationally, 2025 will see the complete completion of the Mackenzie Valley Highway business case and conclusion of the environmental assessment.

Mr. Speaker, with integrity, the people of the Sahtu deserve more than reactive crisis management. They deserve a government that plans ahead, that recognizes the unique challenges of northern transportation, and works proactively to ensure the Sahtu communities have reliable, affordable, access to essential supplies. Mr. Speaker, I will not have any questions to the Minister of Infrastructure as I have confidence of support from previous deliberations. Mahsi.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 609-20(1):  
ILLEGAL DRUG ACTIVITY IN SMALL  
COMMUNITIES

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up on my Member's statement from Tuesday, March 11th, 2025. In my Member's statement, I referred to the illegal drug trade within the community of Tettit Zeh and other small communities throughout the Northwest Territories.

The Voice of Denendeh met is one of their stories, and it was placed on social media. I've received a lot of feedback from people throughout the NWT in my efforts to find ways to combat this criminal activity that is happening right within our backyard.

Mr. Speaker, people from all walks of life gave me feedback on what they are witnesses within their own communities and what struggles they are facing in trying to combat this crisis that we are facing. One young lady in particular, who has all the potential in the world to pursue anything she wants to and has a lot to offer her community, has reached out and expressed the hardship that she is enduring in trying to overcome her addiction to this drug. This young lady is looking to take a treatment program to overcome her addictions, and she has my full support.

Mr. Speaker, the RCMP, the local housing authority, and other agencies that are in place to protect our residents, cannot protect us because of policies and procedures. When a person tries to call the local RCMP, they are directed to the Yellowknife detachment and has to go through numerous questions before they hear the complaint. By this time, the individual

who is trying to give the authority a tip feels frustrated and hangs up.

Mr. Speaker, the local housing authority has absolutely no authority to what is happening within their own public housing units. The public housing units are being used as a place to conduct these illegal drug activities. The local housing authority has been approached to assist in combatting this activity but, again, there are policies and procedures that are in place to seemingly protect the criminal. The communities' hands are tied. They are fighting a losing battle.

Mr. Speaker, going back to the young lady who wants to see the community heal from this crisis states that more local community resources have to be made available. Mr. Speaker, can I have unanimous consent to conclude my statement, please.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, colleagues. Mr. Speaker, going back to the young lady who wants to see the community heal from this crisis states that more local community resources have to be made available. Those resources are our own people, not people with fancy degrees. The local residents of our community know who needs help so we, as a government, should provide financial support to the smaller communities to help heal themselves. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Members' statements. Member from Great Slave.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 610-20(1):  
REFLECTIONS ON SITTING AND  
UPCOMING YELLOWKNIFE EVENTS

**MS. REID:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I want to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues for the last two months. It has been a grueling session but also rewarding. I also want to wish them safe travels to their home communities where celebrations are gearing up for the spring that is starting to unfold. I also want to take some time to highlight some wonderful local events that are coming up between now and the next sitting.

Mr. Speaker, we have an absolutely amazing local burlesque and drag scene in Yellowknife right now with monthly shows becoming the norm, Thunder Normz one could say. On April 3rd, the Northern Mosaic Network will be holding another community dinner at the Baker Centre, and I hope to see as many folks as

possible at the event. And in late April, we will see Ecology North's always fantastic Earth Week celebrations this year from April 22nd to 30th. In 2024, there was 24 events and 1100 participants, Mr. Speaker. Events in 2025 will see a bike tune-up, clothing swap, medicine walk, DIY workshops, and an open mic night and more. Mr. Speaker, Yellowknife comes alive at this time of year, and I'm looking forward to coming out of my post-session hibernation to enjoy all our city has to offer. Quyananni, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 611-20(1):  
IMPACTS OF DRUGS IN TLICHO  
COMMUNITIES

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Masi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to send a positive message to our youth so that they stay away from the dangerous path some people are taking.

Mr. Speaker, drugs are still affecting communities in the Tlicho region. On Tuesday, RCMP in Whati were told about drugs being sold out of a home with children. An Alberta youth was arrested for suspected crack cocaine trafficking and possessing a restricted handgun. In Behchoko, one of my constituents said there has been a pandemic of overdoses recently.

Mr. Speaker, we are seeing more young people using their income support payments, which are intended for essential needs, to buy drugs and fuel destructive behaviour. This money is meant to help, not harm. In response, the Tlicho region is taking steps to offer support and recovery options. The Tlicho Addiction Recovery Project received a \$1.9 million commitment from Ottawa and will help people. The program is led by the Tlicho Friendship Centre. The money will help fund much needed counselling, recovery, coaching, and aftercare services for individuals to start healing.

Mr. Speaker, I want young people in all Tlicho communities to go down a path of recovery and wellness. We must continue to empower our youth with traditional knowledge, resources, and family support that they need to make positive choices. Maybe make a good career choice to be a Tlicho astronaut. I hope together we can guide young people in the territory towards a brighter, healthier future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 612-20(1):  
ST. JOHN AMBULANCE THERAPY DOG  
PROGRAM AND VOLUNTEERS

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I am happy to rise to recognize the dedicated volunteers of the therapy dog program in the Northwest Territories.

The therapy dog program, overseen by St. John Ambulance, provides comfort, companionship, and emotional support to individuals in need. Certified therapy dogs and their volunteer handlers visit various community settings. These furry friends offer unconditional love and attention, helping to reduce feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and stress. In particular, the therapy dogs can offer a calming presence and companionship, especially for those who may feel isolated or lonely. The gentle nature of therapy dogs can help to lower stress levels and promote relaxation. Interacting with a friendly therapy dog can boost mood and increase feelings of happiness and well-being, and therapy dogs can serve as a catalyst for social interaction helping people to connect with others and build relationships.

In less than a year, this program in the Northwest Territories has grown from two volunteers to 21, with teams that have joined, provided support, have been tested, trained, and placed in various facilities. People may see therapy dogs doing their great work at locations such as the Avens, Yellowknife Education District No. 1 schools, Home Base Youth Centre, North Slave Correctional Centre, the City of Yellowknife Public Library, Aurora College, Yellowknife Airport, the courthouse, legal aid, or the RCMP, and many other businesses, groups, organizations and community centres. The therapy dog program still has ambitions to grow the number of volunteers and to start placements in Stanton Territorial Hospital, the long-term care facility, and other healthcare facilities this year.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations on the successful relaunch of the reinvigorated therapy dog program. This program stands as a powerful testament to the unwavering commitment of dedicated volunteers who generously provide invaluable services significantly enhancing the well-being of our community members. The dedication and compassion exhibited by both the volunteers and their cherished furry companions have undoubtedly brought immeasurable comfort and joy to countless individuals in our community. We wish you all the best for

continued growth and keep those tails wagging. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 613-20(1):  
IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON  
DEHCHO INFRASTRUCTURE

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin, I would like to wish my number one supporter a very Happy Birthday, my husband Norman. He's at home. Happy Birthday, Norman.

Today I'd like to talk about how climate change is impacting our important infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, last year, three of the government's four territorial-run ferries caused service disruptions because of mechanical issues and the timing of territorial and federal inspections. The Merv Hardie Ferry was retired in Fort Providence in 2012. It could be time to consider bringing the ferry back into services and creating more jobs in the Deh Cho region.

Mr. Speaker, we need to adapt to changing environmental conditions. The last several years have seen more fires, floods, and fluctuating water levels than I can remember. When the Merv Hardie Ferry was retired, there was considerable discussion in this House about repurposing it, finding alternative uses for it elsewhere on the river. But, Mr. Speaker, those discussions did not lead to any concrete actions and now there is pressure on our transportation system due to climate change and aging infrastructure. Disruptive travel harms businesses and makes it more difficult for essential services to operate. I want to do something about this, the vulnerabilities we face with our current systems.

I would like to know what the plans are for the Merv Hardie Ferry moving forward. Is it salvageable? How much will it cost to repair? Mr. Speaker, breakup will happen in a few months. We need to ensure transportation runs smoothly. I will have questions for the Minister of Infrastructure. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 614-20(1):  
RECOGNITION OF STAFF

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're coming to the end of a very long session. But it's been interesting to say the least. We've had some interesting discussions

in this House, and we've had some interesting discussions in our committees as well. But oftentimes we forget the backbone of what allows us to do this work, and that's our staff and I'd like just to stand today and to recognize the hardworking staff both on with Cabinet, I'm sure, but certainly from our AOC side, from our committee side, all our committee clerks, and the staff that work behind the scenes to ensure that we get the information that we need to do the job that we do. And they do just an amazing job, Mr. Speaker. And I know I can't name them here in the House but certainly they know who they are, and I just want to say a big congrats to them and a thanks to them as we cue up and get ready for our next spring setting. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. And I couldn't echo your Member's statement any better.

Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 615-20(1):  
SCIENTISTS ACT AND REGULATIONS

**MR. HAWKINS:** All right, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I want to talk about the Scientists Act, including its regulations. Now, it isn't necessarily the most exciting topic for most people. Now even though we have millions of subscribers over social media, and the press may not even care about this story, I can tell you right now it is the foundation of some of the work we do in terms of respect and ability for Northerners to grow.

Mr. Speaker, we get people from all over the world coming here to study climate change, permafrost, flora, even Santa Claus is tuning in on this. Maybe that's Rudolph, Mr. Speaker; I don't know. Mr. Speaker, we get people from all over the place coming here. But the challenge here, I find, is there's minimal collaboration with our northern scientists or experts, Mr. Speaker. I would say it's ideas, concepts of regs and guidelines. It says collaboration at best? Nah, it doesn't even suggest that.

Mr. Speaker, where we're going wrong here is the fact that we're not working with our local talented scientists and experts in these fields. Mr. Speaker, our research is important. We need the money; we need the collaboration. Mr. Speaker, did I mention we need the money and the knowledge?

Mr. Speaker, with that money and knowledge, we can grow strengths of Northerners, skills, and even interest youth in the future.

You raised your hand? (audio) that's twice. That was a thumb, right?

Mr. Speaker, the important part here is I'm trying to talk about we have important information and work going on here in the North, but it's not being collaborated in a meaningful way. Mr. Speaker, when I talk about partnerships, I look to the guidelines, it doesn't really do anything other than creating general suggestions about working with people. Where I see is here, we've missed opportunities of sharing information, sharing areas of study, sharing areas of concerns that have previously been studied and we can work further on.

Mr. Speaker, what I'm getting down to is respect for our science community so we can do more. So when we have one group coming from who know where, Germany, whether the Netherlands, or other friendly nations of course, wanting to do work up North here, you know, they may be overlapping and we're missing the great opportunity of our talented people of being able to work together to get a common end and strengthen. Furthermore, the concepts and concerns outlined about IG, or Indigenous government collaboration, again, is thin at best.

Here is the opportunity as I summarize, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we must have expectations in the guidelines that they share the raw data in real time, Mr. Speaker. There must be collaborations with northern sciences and or experts in our fields, in our departments, Mr. Speaker. And finally, we must at this moment recognize the important work and then celebrate what our northern scientists do for our northern youth and our northern careers and our northern future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 616-20(1):  
EVENTS OF FEBRUARY 28 TO MARCH 2,  
2025

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Colleagues, this past weekend, February 28th to March 2nd, was a very busy weekend for me. As you are all aware, the King Charles III Coronation Medal presentation happened Friday evening with the Premier, Commissioner, Senator and MP and recipients that were in Yellowknife. I would like to recognize the people that were nominated from the Nahendeh Riding.

- Nominated by the Premier: Deneze James Nakehk'o, Lucy Jane Simon, and Soham Srimani
- Nominated by the Senator: Chief Kele Antoine, Gilbert Cazon, and our own Mary Jane Cazon

I would like to thank the Premier for allowing me the pleasure of handing out the medals to Lucy and Soham.

Saturday morning, I had the pleasure of attending the NWTAC interactive sessions, the AGM and the closing banquet and awards ceremony. Much to my surprise, the Nahendeh riding did well receiving three awards:

- Margaret Ireland received the 2025 Community Service Award;
- Sambaa K'e First Nation received the 2025 Community Builder Award; and
- Jean Marie River received the 2025 Climate Change Resilience Award.
- As well, a good friend of mine, Ms. Eleanor Young, won the Evelyn Krutko Mighty Warrior Award, and I was honored to see her get this award.

Colleagues, at both events, each presenter provided a speech and it was given to me, and I have attached them to the end of my statement, which I would like them deemed as read and printed in the Hansard.

#### **King Charles III Coronations Medal – Premier's**

**Lucy Jane Simon** has maintaining and preserving the history and the culture of Jean Marie River through on the land practices and art. She is a very talented artist known throughout the NWT and nationally with some of her work displayed at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. Lucy was employed with the Government as a Community Health Worker for 25 years. She is a successful businesswoman managing her own B&B for the past 22 year and 2020 Dehcho Wise Women Award Winner.

**Soham Srimani's** contributions to the community of Nahanni Butte have helped improved the lives of its residents. Through his hard work and out of the box thinking, he has been instrumental in getting multiple new residential housing projects for the community, leading economic development initiatives and helped create a number of jobs for residents. From store expansion to getting a post office in community to construction of Arbor, he planned these infrastructure projects from scratch.

**Déneze James Nakehk'o:** Overcoming obstacles in life and working to understand his own trauma responses, Déneze takes responsibility for his own wellness and carries with him good lessons that have allowed him to do what his people have done for so long - change the world, not because he wanted to, but because it was needed. Creating cultural

connections, organizing for Idle No More, a journalist telling the stories of his people, Déneze is making a difference in the lives of all northerners, especially the youth.

#### **2025 Community Service Award**

The Community Service Award recognizes an individual, an organization, or a business that has made a significant contribution to improving the well-being of an NWT Community and its residents.

It is with great pleasure that we present the 2025 Community Service Award to Margaret Ireland. Margaret is an elected Councillor and has worked for many years as the Resource Management Coordinator for Ttsets'édh'edéli First Nation (Ttsets keh dahyli), or Jean Marie River First Nation.

Margaret Ireland is widely known for her long-standing commitment to her community. She has been a trailblazer in tackling climate change and supporting community-led research. Most of her career has focused on helping Jean Marie River First Nation build resilience to the effects of a changing climate.

Margaret first heard her community's concerns about changes to the land as a teenager in the 1970s. In the early 2000s, when the Mackenzie Valley Gas Pipeline proposal was developing, Margaret advocated for the inclusion of Indigenous voices. She worked with Elders and researchers to complete a Traditional Knowledge baseline study. This was the start of a series of collaborations led by Margaret lasting over 20 years.

Under Margaret's direction, the community has forged strong relationships with several research partners over the years. With their support, Margaret guided studies to identify how climate change was affecting the landscape, understand the implications for the community's wellbeing, and identify strategies for adaptation. Margaret always ensured the community leads these studies and that the results come back to the community. Community engagement and communication have been central features of all her initiatives.

Over the past three years, Margaret has collaborated with Wilfrid Laurier University researchers and a consultant to consolidate the learnings from an incredible two decades of climate work. She aims to harness this accumulated knowledge to inform the development of a climate change adaptation strategy for Jean Marie River First Nation.

Margaret continues to seek new partnerships that can support her vision to integrate climate change adaptation into the way community

members care for each other and for the land. After leading the change on climate change for all these years, Margaret has determined that to meet the challenges ahead the community must build adaptation thinking and approaches into all the work they do. To mobilize this vision, she has launched an initiative to build leadership and climate change adaptation skills within Jean Marie River First Nation's Chief and Council, and staff.

In addition to her tireless efforts on climate change, Margaret has continued to represent Jean Marie River First Nation on the Dehcho Health and Wellness Working Group, the Edézhíe Management Board, and the Dehcho Protected Areas Communities Working Group.

Congratulations Margaret! You are an inspiration for us all. Thank you for your long-standing service to Jean Marie River First Nation and the NWT.

#### **Evelyn Krutko Mighty Warrior Award**

Our next award is the Evelyn Krutko Mighty Warrior Award. This award embodies everything Evelyn Krutko stood for. Hard-working, honest, never giving up, a leader, strong and one that goes the extra mile.

The recipient of our next award truly does embody the intent of this award. Her life's work has been a journey and a career marked by dedication, hard work, long hours and unwavering commitment. Her dedication was not just about putting the hours in. It was also her belief in the work she did for the people of the NWT. It was about understanding what decisions she made at her job and how it affected the NWT that made her stand out.

The recipient of this award has worked in the NWT since 1987, 15 of those years spent on the community level. She came to the north as a cooperative student placement in 1987 and returned to the North in 1988 to continue working on regional land use planning initiatives, particularly in the Beaufort Delta Region. Some of that early work formed the basis for the Community Conservation Plans adopted by each of the Inuvialuit communities. Moving to Ulukhaktok in 1990, she worked as the Housing Manager, and then as part of a community transfer initiative. She became the Senior Administrative Officer (SAO) with the Hamlet of Ulukhaktok. She also brought the local housing operations under the authority of community government council. She served a number of terms as President and Board member for the Association of Municipal Administrators (AMANWT). She worked briefly for the NWT Association of Communities and the Local Government Administrators of the

Northwest Territories (formerly AMANWT) in 2003/2004 when she first left Ulukhaktok and before joining the GNWT.

The NWTAC has had the pleasure of working very closely with this lady as prior Deputy Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs for 5 years, and before that as Deputy Minister of Regional Operations. She joined Housing NWT as President and CEO May 17, 2021.

She has spent many years of her life attending the NWTAC meetings and has made many close friends along the way.

As she steps into her well-earned years of retirement, we look back on how she has made an impact on the NWT and our lives.

In your retirement we wish you well, and much happiness and much deserved time spent with your family and doing the things you love.

Thank you for your commitment to the NWT and the NWTAC over the years. Ladies and gentlemen, it is my honour to award the 2025 Evelyn Krutko Mighty Warrior Award to Ms. Eleanor Young.

#### **2025 Community Builder Award**

The Community Builder Award recognizes exemplary leadership and innovation in how the council or community government operates. We are pleased to present the 2025 Community Builder Award to Sambaa K'e First Nation.

For many years Sambaa K'e First Nation has been building partnerships and pioneering innovative approaches to protect the land and water, strengthen food security, spur economic development, and adapt to a changing climate. Here are a few examples of their efforts along this remarkable journey.

Back in 2010, they took a bold step forward by teaming up with various partners to assess their water resources and identify vulnerabilities. This was the beginning of a series of proactive initiatives that have truly made a difference. From crafting a community-based source water protection plan to improving their solid waste facility—which included removing a substantial amount of hazardous waste—they have shown us what it means to care for our environment. Today they continue to monitor local fisheries, habitats, and water quality as part of the AAROM program.

Years ago, the community made a firm commitment to building food security. As a fly-in community, there are very real challenges to access fresh produce. They created an agriculture development plan, partnered with experts, and integrated Dene protocols into

their food-growing initiatives. Their efforts have blossomed into one of the largest community gardens in the Northwest Territories, complete with a greenhouse, a large growing field, and even a compost station. Youth are engaged in the garden program and produce is shared through the community store and cooking circles. Building on this success, SKFN is exploring innovative ways to grow food in firebreaks and preserve their harvest for year-round enjoyment.

In addition to food growing, SKFN has redoubled efforts to support intergenerational on-the-land activities including youth and elder trapping programs and seasonal community harvesting initiatives. They restored an older culture camp facility, and now it is used for community programs including healing camps, youth activities, and on the land camps.

The community store is a good example of SKFN's creative approach to solving challenges. Owned and operated by the First Nation's development corporation, it's run like a social enterprise, focusing on providing a service and positive impacts for the community. They have the power to choose what products to bring in and set fair prices. Profits are reinvested to ease the rising cost of living for everyone. It's a creative and compassionate approach that reflects their commitment to community well-being.

Sambaa K'e has also been at the forefront of climate change adaptation initiatives. Through an innovative partnership with Ka'agee Tu First Nation and researchers from Wilfrid Laurier University, the communities came together to learn from each other and reflect on their work to date. This process culminated in adaptation plans, with priorities and strategies for each community. This kind of collaboration is what we need more of in the NWT.

SKFN is a long-standing leader in Indigenous-led conservation work. For years Samba K'e has been pursuing the establishment of a legally protected conservation area that aligns with their environmental and cultural values. This is not just about protecting the land; it's about weaving Indigenous-led conservation into the very fabric of economic development and the wider Dene economy.

Congratulations to Sambaa K'e First Nation for your many accomplishments. Thank you for your unwavering service and dedication to building a brighter future for your community. Your hard work inspires us all, and we look forward to seeing what more you will accomplish in the years to come.

#### **2025 Climate Change Resilience Award**

The GNWT Department of Environment and Climate Change sponsors the Climate Change Resilience Award to recognize the key role community governments play in building resilience and adapting to a changing climate. Communities in the NWT are on the front lines of climate change. Our communities are gaining momentum as they create plans and develop partnerships to chart a course for their futures in an increasingly uncertain environment.

The Climate Change Resilience Award recognizes leadership in climate change adaptation. This award honours a community that is taking a pro-active approach to the challenges caused by climate change and has strengthened community resilience through their actions. The award includes \$5,000 to support on-going climate change adaptation work being completed by the recipient.

Our award winner is a great example of how communities can take a leading role in overcoming climate change challenges. Ttsets'éhk'édélj First Nation, also known as Jean Marie River First Nation, has demonstrated consistent leadership in climate change research and adaptation planning and action over many years demonstrates this vision and determination.

For more than two decades Jean Marie River First Nation has been studying and documenting the changing climate and its impacts on the land, the water, and the health and wellness of residents. Throughout these studies they have prioritized community engagement and involvement. At the same time, they have built strong and enduring partnerships with researchers from universities and other organizations. Jean Marie River First Nation has used an approach that combines traditional knowledge and western science to ensure that the steps they take to adapt help build resilience in ways that recognize and respect the culture and values of the community.

With direct and dramatic experience of flooding and wildfires in recent years, Jean Marie River continues to demonstrate commitment to learning and improving their preparedness and resilience. Amongst their many initiatives completed and ongoing, here are some highlights:

The community has led major studies to better understand the impacts of the changing climate and the risks these changes pose to health and wellness. They worked with researchers to conduct a permafrost vulnerability assessment



and created a map of permafrost around the community. The results of this study were used to determine how permafrost thaw may impact vegetation, wildlife, and traditional practices, and ultimately the food security of community residents into the future.

These studies have led to more informed planning, and a host of other projects to tackle community concerns.

A community-based participatory planning process was used to consider all the climate risks and impacts as well as the community's values and vision for the future. This process led to the creation of a community-wide adaptation plan and implementation framework.

Climate change has significantly increased the number and urgency of issues competing for community government time and resources. What Jean Marie River's adaptation plan has done has really helped the community define and prioritize the climate impacts and the steps they want to take. Adaptation planning has also been helpful in finding funding to implement actions. Coming out of the adaptation plan several projects have happened including:

Improving the safety of those travelling on the land by developing best practices for travel that consider the uncertainty and additional risks due to climate change.

Integrating climate adaptation as a core practice across all community programs, services, operations, and governance. For example, job descriptions have been updated to include climate change responsibilities.

All these studies and implementation projects have featured extensive community engagement. A community-based Climate Change Working Group has been established and is currently leading a project.

Looking to the future, the community is doing succession planning, preparing for a younger generation to take on community government roles and keep the momentum going on climate change adaptation. This includes supporting trainees to participate in the Northern Leadership Development Program through Aurora College.

We encourage you to go talk to tonight's winner about the incredible work they are doing to strengthen resilience in their community. The Department of Environment and Climate Change is proud to present the 2025 Climate Change Resilience Award to Jean Marie River First Nation. We congratulate them on their achievement and wish them continued success! Councillor Margaret Ireland please

come forward and accept this award on behalf of Jean Marie River First Nation.

Sunday, I attended the NWT Speed Skating Championship to watch athletes from Fort Simpson participate. I am proud to say that the team from Fort Simpson was the second largest team at the competition. When I spoke to some of the athletes, they were very happy with their results, the organizers and coaches for a special weekend. I have attached the list of the athletes and coaches, and I would like them deemed as read and printed in the Hansards.

Congratulations to all these residents of the Nahendeh representing us proudly. Thank you very much.

#### **Fort Simpson Speed Skating Team – NWT Champs YK March 1-2, 2025**

- Payton Bennett
- Ember Sibbeston
- Mia Hardisty- Atkins
- Kaiya Williams-Snider
- Wren Tsetso
- Navalyn Okraïneec-Burrill
- Sarah Wright
- Serena Hanna
- Jayde Allen
- Ray-Anne Erasmus
- Avery Blyth
- Hunter Cazon

#### **Coaches**

- Val Gendron
- Ava Erasmus

Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife South.

#### **MEMBER'S STATEMENT 617-20(1): RETIREMENT OF STEVE LOUITT**

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to detail a small selection of the contributions to the public service made by someone who, until quite recently, was a Yellowknife South resident.

Mr. Steven Loutitt is a proud Metis originally from Fort Smith and who has been working for the public service, in some form or another, for

over 37 years in various roles to support program delivery for people of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Loutitt loves session. He revels in the thrill and in the excitement it creates, and he had timed his retirement in a way to ensure he would support his team at infrastructure through session. Tomorrow is his official retirement. He is very sad that today is our last day.

Mr. Loutitt began his public service career with the city, then with Transport Canada, and then when the federal government devolved the airport responsibility to the GNWT, he became a GNWT public servant way back in 1995. He was a firefighter, ultimately fire chief, and if you have the opportunity I would highly recommend asking Mr. Loutitt what it was like to be the officer-in-charge when a missile fell off of a CF18 onto the Yellowknife golf course and also what it was like to be the officer-in-charge when there was an aborted landing two days later.

Fun fact, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Loutitt's father was presented with the Fire Services Exemplary Service Medal in June of 1988. Mr. Steven Loutitt was presented with the very same honour by the Governor General of Canada in February of 2009.

Mr. Loutitt eventually became the YZF airport manager, later the director of compliance and licensing, and before taking on the role of ADM for regional operations and eventually assuming his current position as the deputy minister of infrastructure in 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Mr. Loutitt for his work that is not always publicly visible. It is the personal attention that he pays to his team. The size of the team for whom he was responsible has obviously grown significantly over the last 37 years of his career. But his care and his attention for every member has never wavered. I'd like to give a brief example, Mr. Speaker.

The Department of Infrastructure had lost a member of our team not long ago. It was a difficult loss for many. And very shortly after that, Mr. Loutitt and I were on duty travel to one of our regional communities. He asked if I would mind if he stepped away to spend time with some of the members of his team. He thought there were some who might have a particular connection to the event. These were not his direct reports, not even close. They were not staff that I believe he knew very well, but Mr. Loutitt had an instinct that they needed extra support. And he was right. Not only did he take time out of the day, he then arranged extra time and made additional effort to ensure supports

were able over the coming days for this member of the team and for others. And it's come back to us, Mr. Speaker, that this was extremely meaningful for those involved.

It might seem like a small thing but, Mr. Speaker, I know you know the constant barrage of demands on a deputy minister on any given day can be immense. There are always ongoing expectations to keep large projects moving, find solutions, and endless series of crisis, and a few demands from Ministers. And, yet, Mr. Speaker, throughout my year in this role, never once has Mr. Loutitt lost sight of the fact that it is the people around him who should be receiving his unwavering attention. He always knows what's going on throughout the entire huge diverse Department of Infrastructure, but he has also shown me that sometimes the most confident thing that a leader can do is to empower his team to shine.

Mr. Speaker, I want to issue and give my thanks, my congratulations to Mr. Loutitt on the eve of his retirement, and on his resumption of full-time duties as a proud father to Drew, Ellie, and Emmy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Well done, Member from Yellowknife South. Members' statements. Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to request unanimous consent that we move item number 6, recognition of visitors in the gallery, up to item number 4, please. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Member from Frame Lake is asking unanimous consent to move recognition of visitors in the gallery up. Seeing no nays, we'll move it up. Member from Frame Lake.

### Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have some very special guests in the gallery today. I dare say this may be the first time we've recognized a dog in the Assembly, but we have therapy dog Kit and her handler Joanne Cecchetto today in the chamber and several officials visiting from the St. John Ambulance Priory Headquarters led by CEO Brent Fowler; Samantha Rodick, director of community services; Lori Anderson, chancellor of St. John Ambulance Priory of Canada; and, Patricia Johnson, regional chair of Manitoba and Northwest Territories council. I'd like to extend a heartfelt welcome to these guests. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. EDJERICON:** Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize Canadian Space Agency astronaut Colonel Jeremy Hansen; Annie Belanger from Canadian Space Agency; Anne Burrow and Dave Sharpe from Bear Claw Strategy. Also, Ted Tsetta, the former chief of YKDFN; Liza Peiper-Charlo, band councillor from YKDFN. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to -- oddly enough, I'll do it this way: I want to acknowledge the great statement by the Member for Yellowknife South about our good friend Steve Loutitt. She said much of what I would have liked to have said but it is recognition, so I'll say this to Mr. Steve Loutitt, our retiring DM of infrastructure. I want to thank him for his many years of service, and I used to call him -- sorry, I used to call him director Loutitt when he was a manager, and then guess what, he got appointed to director. Then I used to call him assistant deputy minister accidentally, and then he got bumped up. Then I called him deputy minister, and then he got bumped again. And I've been calling him Commissioner lately, so you never know. I might be the lucky rabbit's foot. But the only fault I'll finish I find with Mr. Loutitt is, and I'm darn well going to say this, Dallas is a terrible team. Go Green Bay.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Inuvik Twin Lakes.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize a page from Inuvik Twin Lakes, Katalena Ciboci-Raymond who is here with us this week. And I'd like to recognize my deputy minister who is here in the capacity as part of the St. John Ambulance and her dog Kit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Inuvik Twin Lakes. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to recognize former chief Ted Tsetta and David Sharpe and Ian Bailey. It's nice to see you here today. They're all friends of mine from my time working with YKDFN. I'd also like to recognize a very special person. Fortunately for all of you, the reason I'm here today, so you can blame him, my father Terry Testart. Thanks for being here, Dad.

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

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize William Gagnon who is

the executive director of the NWT Medical Association who is here with us today. And also thank two of our pages who are Yellowknife North constituents. We have Ace Wickens and Solomon Young, and they're both students at William Mac School. So thanks to all the pages as well for your help this week.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, first I'd like to recognize two hardworking pages from the Inuvik Boot Lake riding, Ms. Caitlyn Wright and Mr. Wilhem Jellema who have been here working all this week, and I'd like to thank them for their hard work. And I'd also like to recognize Mr. Loutitt. I had an opportunity to work with Mr. Loutitt a little in a previous life, and maybe we never always saw eye to eye but certainly always had great respect and appreciated all the hard work he had done on behalf of GNWT. And to echo my friend from Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Loutitt, go Packers.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from the Sahtu.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to recognize deputy minister Steve Loutitt and all the wonderful work and support he has given the department, particular to the Mackenzie Valley Highway and the other projects. And additionally, I would also like to recognize, on our last day of the session, the hardworking staff of the Assembly and our interpreters. I hope you enjoy the break, spring. Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Masi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, [no translation available] masi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to recognize my constituent William Gagnon who is back from his international travels, and welcome back to the Assembly. And I too would like to recognize Mr. Steve Loutitt who I did not have the pleasure of working with in my time in the public service but was very much far and away the most welcoming deputy minister since I took on this role, and I believe we have become fast friends

and I look forward to having a beer with him tomorrow night. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to recognize Mr. Terry Testart, a resident of Fort McPherson and senior administrative officer for the hamlet of Fort McPherson. I worked with Terry several years ago. And I wanted to welcome Terry. And also to Mr. Loutitt for his many years of service and to the interpreters for their dedicated service while we are conducting our work here. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Mackenzie Delta. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member for Yellowknife South.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On a busy day like today, I'm afraid I might be missing Yellowknife South residents who I can't see from behind me. Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, we are a family friendly neighbourhood and I am happy to say we have two youth here that I will recognize from Yellowknife South. Aima Tabbaa and Olivia Costache, thank you for helping us as pages here in the House.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife South. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Kam Lake.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Terry's going to feel very special today because we're all fighting over him, but I'd like to say a warm welcome to my constituent, and we might need some proof of residency now to Mr. Terry Testart. Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to acknowledge Steve Loutitt in the House today. I started my journey with the GNWT as an intern for the Department of Transportation, spent many a days on the tarmac with Mr. Loutitt, including the year where a missile hit the golf course. What a time to start in communications. But very much my best memories of him were certainly at the hockey arena watching our children grow into goalies together. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Kam Lake. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my beautiful darling wife Elina Edjericon and children for putting up with me while she takes care of the homestead. Also I wanted to recognize my constituents in Dettah, N'dilo, Lutselk'e, and Fort Resolution. Also I want to recognize my

constituent assistant Taylor Pagotto and Warren Delorme for all their hard work. And I want to thank my colleagues and ledge staff and cooks and technical people. And finally, I want to recognize Maro Rose Sundberg, Jonas Lafferty, Dennis Drygeese, and the interpreters. Without you, this would never be possible. I want to say mahsi. And finally, Steve Loutitt and Terry Testart, I want to recognize you and everybody else in the House. Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh. I apologize that I gave him a second shot, but he had a long list. So recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Thebacha.

**HON. JAY MACDONALD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too would like to recognize my cousin Steve Loutitt and thank him for his many years of service in the NWT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take a minute to recognize some people who have been here with us for the past six weeks while I've been in the House. All of the interpreters who do the good work of letting the people of the territory know what we're up to. We were lucky enough to be invited to a potluck that they put on today, and it was a wonderful experience. And, of course, I also want to recognize Troy Aikman of the Department of Infrastructure, Mr. Steve Loutitt, one of the -- you know, the hardest working people that I've ever met, one of the most positive. He's a great member of our team and, you know, very, very supportive of his team. And that's really, you know, what we need in this territory and in this government, is those kinds of folks and individuals, and we are indebted to him for his 37 years of service. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

I guess it's my turn to recognize deputy minister Mr. Loutitt. Great taste in football players. Oh what a team. You know those Green Bay Packers fans, well, you know, they don't have the taste that you do. So I welcome you in your retirement. I know we will see some posts of your new abode with the Dallas Stars out there, so we all have faith. As well, I'd like to recognize Mr. Testart. I recognize Mr. Terry Testart because he was the first person I got to work with when I became working for the Government of the Northwest Territories when

he was in Behchoko. So that doesn't mean he's aged at all; I did. He's looked as young as he was before so welcome here. As well, I'd like to recognize Mary Jane Cazon, our interpreter that does Dene Zhatie, as well as the -- as the Premier said, the interpreters, they had our first potluck and we got to share it with them today at lunch time. So thank you very much for that.

If we've missed anyone in the gallery today, welcome to your chambers. I greatly appreciate the fact that you allow us to represent the people of the Northwest Territories even though it's for a short period of time. I hope you are enjoying the proceedings. It's always nice to see people in the gallery. With that being said, we'll take a five-minute adjournment, please.

---SHORT RECESS

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, colleagues. Motions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

### Motions

MOTION 51-20(1):  
AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICY,  
DEFEATED

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker,

WHEREAS the affirmative action policy was established in the late 1980's;

AND WHEREAS the affirmative action policy was intended to support northern employment by creating and strengthening opportunities for northern Indigenous people;

AND WHEREAS the affirmative action policy was also intended to support and recognize long-term commitments of non-Indigenous peoples;

AND WHEREAS the affirmative action policy was intended to support women and persons with disabilities;

AND WHEREAS the affirmative action policy is a policy and requires periodic evaluation and updating from time to time;

AND WHEREAS the Indigenous employment policy has had a number of concerns highlighted by committees of this Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Indigenous employment policy has received enormous negative feedback from the public;

AND WHEREAS the Indigenous employment policy has not been received by the public in a positive way;

AND WHEREAS, more than one committee has requested that the government not proceed with the Indigenous employment policy or, at the very least, to pause this policy until a clear consensus of Members has been reached;

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the Member for Range Lake, that this Legislative Assembly calls upon the Government of the Northwest Territories to immediately halt any further advancement and implementation of the new Indigenous employment policy, also known as the IEP, and return to using the affirmative action policy without delay as the primary hiring guidelines of the Government of the Northwest Territories;

AND FURTHER, that the Minister of Finance engage with the Standing Committee on Government Operations, prior to any further changes to the Government of the Northwest Territories' hiring policy, to discuss and seek guidance that can improve the affirmative action policy which ultimately strengthens the Government of the Northwest Territories' hiring practices with the intent that supports northern Indigenous, long-term Northerners, women, persons with disabilities, as well as other marginalized communities;

AND FURTHERMORE, that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a response to this motion within 120 days.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. The motion is in order. To the motion. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's been a lot of talk about this since it's been, in my humble opinion, rammed through. This policy change is quite frustrating. Many committees have already spoken against this and want it to be slowed down. Recently, one of the committees -- although I won't speak to it because it was an in-camera and confidential meeting, but I'll say it received a lot of feedback, and it was overwhelmingly concerned in the manner of the change and wanted the territorial's hiring policy stay as the affirmative action policy which we've seen for over 35 years.

Mr. Speaker, furthermore, the importance of it is no policy should go without review. I definitely believe in that. And there were changes, and I'd like to highlight one for the public's benefit to appreciate some of the changes that could have happened and should have happened and need part of the periodic details of what we're talking about.

So by way of example, Mr. Speaker, there is a -- within the current policy, which ends, according to the Minister and the government on April 1, if you were born in the Northwest Territories, you would be considered -- if you are non-Indigenous that is, and you would be considered a P2. And if you left the day after you were born here, you could come back any time of our lifetime and be treated as a P2. And for the public, that's priority number 2. But, again, most people will know what this means.

That said, Mr. Speaker, I think that misses the intent of what the policy was about. And it was about inspiring and finding ways to recognize the importance of northern people who have committed.

So first and foremost, no one I spoke to had any issues with Indigenous people from the Northwest Territories being treated as priority 1. As a matter of fact, the empowerment opportunity is absolutely critical to grow that. But there's elements that find the frustration where Northerners feel betrayed by this process. I have heard from people from the top of the North to the south of the North that there are ways we could have tweaked the current policy in a progressive way. I realize that there are certain overlapping Indigenous relationships that needed to be recognized. I too think that that's important.

What is problematic with the policy is I don't believe it's ever been used in the fullness of how it should have been used. That said, there are tweaks that could have been considered, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we need to understand the problems. The government will say well, we don't have enough Indigenous employment and it's not reaching the ratio of 50 percent of the North. That may be statistically true.

Now, what my experience has been around these types of problems is it always start with what do you want me to tell you on the statistics and we'll find a way to tell you the story through the numbers. In other words, we could have found any answer we really wanted to given the direction and the position. Also, Mr. Speaker, at the same time is we're not recognizing key fundamental foundational problems with the affirmative action program. It is a process of saving and -- saving and recognizing problems. So what am I saying?

Well, we have low education opportunities. We have high expectation of credentials. We have to find a gateway to create opportunities. We have communities where graduation rates are below 50 percent. That is the true critical problem of what's happening here. Creating a

new IEP program, Mr. Speaker, isn't solving these problems, Mr. Speaker. It's just a fundamental shell game of trying to say, statistically, we need to raise these up. Mr. Speaker, when people want to work for the Northwest Territories and they are Indigenous, they are supported. And I support that. And I think that we have programs through -- and we certainly have exemptions through the Premier and Cabinet where we could do direct appointments. So if we need to improve the statistics, I'm certainly in favour of that. But opening -- kicking the door open wide and saying anyone from Canada, from whether it's Nova Scotia all the way to BC, is now hit a priority on this new policy is quite frustrating. As a matter of fact, again, it feels is the GNWT trying to save the national problem? Give it a local result? I'm not sure.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, the government will tell you well, you know, it's always had legal issues. Well, I think there's always legal issues with a lot of policies. This one in particular, I'm not confident it's there. I'm not aware if it's ever been publicly challenged. In other words, tested in court, received any judicial guidance saying that.

Now, every Minister will say somebody in many the background says there's questions about it. Well, that may be true. There's question about our BIP. There's always questions about the BIP. And, you know what? Fundamentally, Northerners have grown to appreciate that and recognize they have limits, and sometimes it doesn't work out in their favour. That said, they do recognize how important some of these little nuggets of being a Northerner are represented and respected.

Mr. Speaker, the affirmative action program has been bought in for a generation or more -- if not We're getting close to two generations -- who have understood the importance of the value of that particular program. And to throw it out, again, feels like a frustration.

Now, let's talk about other areas of aspects, Mr. Speaker, that are actually are foundational to this issue. So I've talked to mining companies, and they're frustrated too. They're hearing, wow, we have to hire more Indigenous people, which is fantastic. They go so if the GNWT gets to change its policy, how does it affect their socioeconomic agreements? You know, they're like, well, so if it's not good for the GNWT, is it good for us? Where is this fairness? Mr. Speaker, it's about fair application and reasonable application that respect Northerners' commitments.

The other aspect is, Mr. Speaker, not everyone wants to work for the Government of the

Northwest Territories. I know there are a lot of people in various communities that don't want to work for the GNWT. And believe it or not -- I know this is hard to believe -- but the GNWT has long left the title or honour or pillar of opportunity as the employer of choice. It is no longer that. Yes, some people have enjoyed a great career here. Some have had great advancement. Some have, you know, had these dynamic experiences that all they do is talk about, you know, it's great going to work every day. I'm happy for them. But not everyone wants to work for the government. We have a federal government that's constantly competing for Indigenous people. We have Indigenous governments constantly competing for them. So it makes only perfect sense -- wait a minute, here's statistics again -- that Indigenous people are being hired in their community government organizations, which I think is incredible, but yet the GNWT is not getting those people applying there. So I think it's one of these narratives that you have to drill down and ask, what question are we really asking? Or do we already have the answer, and we're just trying to find the facts through the back door of statistics? I don't know.

Mr. Speaker, broader, now I'm going to speak, you have communities. And I've been to, like, every community of the North, except for Sachs. But I've been to every community of the North. And I can tell you jobs are tough in a small community. It's tough to find them. It's tough to find employment. And we don't do enough to inspire and create creative opportunities to get that. So if employment is the issue, why don't we have a jobs mandate, a war time mandate to say we're going to put employment and we're going to raise education standards and we're going to throw everything at these opportunities we can get. So back to where's the fundamental problem? We'll call these the cornerstones of this issue which is education and opportunities. And that's really what we're having here, is this -- and that's what was trying to identify new ways to advance.

Mr. Speaker, I have more to say, and like most people know, I could probably go on for quite a while, but this is a very serious topic and it's very frustrating. And I've had people from all ranges of support so don't think it's just the P2 candidates that are mad. It's also Indigenous people that I've spoken to who feel that their recognition and commitment Northerners have made has been lost. And it's unfortunate that the way that these conversations get talked about, they could be misconstrued in other ways. And it's very frustrating, and it's very difficult.

I have heard from many GNWT employees who are afraid to comment because they're GNWT

employees. Their democratic right to communicate to their elected officials, either written and even in sometimes verbal, are very frustrating for them because they don't feel that their voices could be heard. And so we may have received an enormous overwhelming amount of feedback at committee at the call of committee. But I wish we could have this public so the government could have that. I wish government employees could feel safe to say, you know what, I'm upset or frustrated by this. But we can't in this environment. And I wouldn't want anything else be betrayed -- portrayed -- sorry, just to be clear, portrayed, that people just feel left out by this government.

Mr. Speaker, I will be requesting a recorded vote when we do come to that particular time. And I think what's key to me here is the fact that this government can reverse this, pause it. I've asked them to halt it through the motion. I thank the seconder who's supported the motion to get it on the floor. I encourage people to continue to open their mind and see the opportunity that's being walked away from and respect people who have committed their lives, their families to the North, who invest in the North, who want this to be part of their future and by not -- by walking away from them, it's that empty feeling that your government is walking away from you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake -- or sorry, Yellowknife Centre. Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in our sister territory Yukon, Yukoners are only officially known as Sourdoughs until they have survived a full winter. Here in the Northwest Territories it's a bit more complicated. You have to live half your life and then you become a P2. This has been -- for 30 years, this has been a cultural touchstone of the Northwest Territories, somewhat absurdly as well because there's plenty of people who don't work for government and, of course, plenty of people who do work for government who don't occupy that status but enjoy their careers anyway. But no matter what, that idea of, like, when you officially graduate and become, you know, a true blue Northerner, a true frozen Northerner, whatever we want to call it, so the idea to just take this away with the stroke of a pen after 30 years of this being, again, part of our culture, part of our workforce, part of our set of benefits that when Northerners think of themselves and think of the advantages they receive, this is one of them. SFA is another one. BIP is another one. The northern tax deduction. These are things that are cherished and people look to them as a competitive advantage to why

we're here and why we stay here. Because it's hard, and it's getting harder.

Mr. Speaker, for 30 years, we've had a failed Indigenous hiring policy. That is not under debate. It hasn't been working. We have -- I think the last public service report, it had the worst -- the worst statistics we've ever seen. This is a problem that needs to be solved. But in trying to solve it when departmental staff spoke to the Standing Committee Committee on Government Operations just earlier this week, they acknowledged that the gaps that exist within this new policy, the Indigenous employment policy, have been creating brand new gaps that the old policy covered. And there's no plan yet to fill them.

The language that was used at the presentation was taking away affirmative action. And I don't know if that was intentional, Mr. Speaker, but I knew that -- do know that that is how so many Northerners feel, that something is being taken away. And the Minister disagrees that this is a benefit. I think Northerners would disagree. And they do feel like something's been taken away.

In an effort to fill the gaps and improve Indigenous hiring, we are creating new ones. People -- persons with disabilities, visible other minority populations are not being covered by the new policy, and that was one of the first messages I got from the public. And I've had many, Mr. Speaker. And it was someone who works for the government who has -- who is differently abled and was furious that this change was made without any consultation and implored MLAs to stand together and reverse the changes.

Mr. Speaker, advocacy groups, to my knowledge, were not consulted on these changes. The people who were consulted on these changes were given a broad set of a problem statement and ways it could be solved but not an actual definition of policy. The drive-by consultations, as my friend has said, in the past of -- of Yellowknife Centre -- were insufficient, insensitive, and wholly inadequate. Because that's what we heard, and that's what we heard from our partner Indigenous governments in particular. We're not making this stuff up, Mr. Speaker. There's a difference between a big P policy of government that governs everything we do here -- or everything -- sorry, not here, but everything we do in the public service and a framework. So the fact that a diversity -- a DEI framework is being pitched as a solution to these problems for the people who are left behind, a lot of those folks are not buying it because it's not -- it doesn't have the security that a big policy of government has. Hiring was iron clad. It followed these rules: P1, P2, P3. That was it.

You couldn't get around it on paper. And we'll get into that, how have -- people have gotten around it. Because like I said, this has not been working.

Mr. Speaker, Northerners deserve to be put first by their government. They deserve priority access to jobs that allowed them to make decision for their territory and serve their communities. At a recent constituency meeting in the Range Lake riding, this was the number one topic of concern, and it was around P2s. And look, there are a lot of different opinions around this and around the P2 status, where it came from, is it constitutional, is it racist. But for members of our community, our northern community, we're all Northerners and we're all in this together. And no one there who was concerned about the loss of P2s and felt like it was an erosion of their identity as a Northerner said we don't want P1s. Everyone's okay with supporting each other and putting Indigenous people first because that's what our policies should do. But to take away P2 with nothing to replace it, that's something that has them concerned.

Mr. Speaker, in the Standing Committee of Government Operations, public engagement, they received 50 respondents. Normally, when we engage the public, if we get a dozen letters that's pretty good. And usually they're being written in by advocacy groups and stakeholders and people with a vested interest in communicating with committee. This case, it was driven by citizens, Northerners. Only one of those pieces of correspondence was supportive of these changes.

Mr. Speaker, the biggest issue was the elimination of P1s, followed by the elimination of P2s, and there was no support for prioritizing southern Indigenous people over Northerners. It's rare we get so much public commentary on matters before this House. So I want to share some of those stories today.

Before we began sitting, Mr. Speaker, I was approached by someone who's had 25 years in the public service. Never raised a complaint, never been to the union, never been to an MLA, completely content with working with for the public service, a career that made him feel proud and valued and even though it's challenging at some times, it was something that got him out of bed and motivated to do every day. When this policy was announced and there was no sense that it was coming, this was shocking to this individual, Mr. Speaker. They feel like they are no longer valued and they're being pushed out of the North. Now, I know that's not the intent of the policy. Let's be very clear. But we're not talking about what's written on the page. We're talking about the



message it sends to our people and the message it sends to public citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I have a lengthier quote from a former GNWT employee who worked for the public service for 35 years. They were a manager when they left the GNWT for a secondment to an Indigenous government and at the end of the two years, this person resigned from the GNWT rather than go back. This individual says that they left the GNWT for many reasons. One was hiring and promoting practices in their department.

Quote: As a GNWT manager for three years, I had no issues with external competition. I was always reminded by my human resources representative assisting me with the competition that I was required to hire a priority 1 Indigenous person if they successfully passed the competition process. It was drilled into me. So I assumed that it was drilled into other hiring managers. The problems that I saw personally were the hiring and promotional activities that happened within departments when there was no human resources representative oversight. People who had the right attitude were selected for transfer assignments into positions for the appropriate time to allow for these persons to gain enough experience to allow them to, air quotes, "apply" on the job. There was a perception within at least my department that First Nations people made excellent support as frontline workers but were not suitable for promotion. Since my resignation, I have met with a lot of other former GNWT employees of First Nations descent, and this has been a running theme.

Mr. Speaker, this story, this work experience, is not one of a failed -- of people failing to follow the policy. It's one of personal workplace biases failing to promote and support Indigenous people through career advancement. That is a much deeper problem, and I know the government is working to fix that through other mechanisms. But this policy was not broken. This policy was just not being followed well enough.

Mr. Speaker, more quotes from -- or more feedback from the public: As the mother of a non-Indigenous child, I do not believe this policy's a very good idea. We have stayed here in the North because of the opportunities for people who have lived here for most or all of their lives. With this new policy, there is no advantage to living or going to school in the North. People who have lived here should have the first opportunity over anyone who does not live in the North, no matter if they are Indigenous or not.

Mr. Speaker, another: I wholeheartedly support priority staffing for Indigenous staff and recognize that change is needed. But the other folks already living in the North having equal footing as a southern candidate is not the right approach in employee retention, succession planning, continuity of services, and fiscal prudence in our current environment.

Quote: This new proposed hiring policy seems like you're trying to achieve an Indigenous hiring quota without a plan to support northern people.

Quote: At a time of such economic uncertainty, why is the GNWT creating opportunities for people who aren't even NWT residents? This new proposed hiring policy seems like you're playing politics with my future to make a more positive government report.

Quote: We have stayed here in the North because of the opportunities for people who have lived here most their lives. With this new policy, there's no advantage to living or going to school in the North.

Mr. Speaker, quote: If the GNWT is committed to human rights, equity, inclusion, economic stability and workplace diversity, it should be expanding and strengthening protections for persons with disabilities rather than rolling them back.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, quote: The morale of your frontline providers has never been so low and many of us feel insulted and disgusted by this new directive. End quote.

What is especially frustrating about this, Mr. Speaker, is how it came through -- how this process came there. My friend from Yellowknife Centre mentioned that this -- he used the word rammed through. And I would tend to agree. This was pushed through a process with little concern for the role of Members of two standing committees, both as representatives of their constituents and active committee Members who play an oversight role to government. Twice the Standing Committee on Government Operations asked for the Minister to pause changes to affirmative action and continue working with committee. Twice the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight asked the Minister to pause changes to the affirmative action policy and continue working with committee. Seven members took a major step of issuing a public letter to the Premier asking for the policy to be reversed and sent back to committee, the same thing this motion calls for. It was only after all of these actions and a public flogging in the media that the Minister decided to compromise the policy and

bring back northern Indigenous hiring in a more limited capacity.

Committees must be respected if this form of government that we have is going to work, Mr. Speaker. Ministers should be listening carefully to the concerns of committees and not ignoring them. That is not consensus government. How this matter has been handled sets a bad precedent for the role of committees in the oversight of major policy decisions going forward, Mr. Speaker. Changes to significant policies are also -- this changes significant policy that, again, has so many people upset. It's not part of the priorities of the Assembly. It's not part of the mandate of the GNWT. And it's not present in the Minister's mandate letter. Certainly I did not run to represent my constituents in this chamber on that promise. And I don't recall anyone else in this chamber saying they pledged to do that on the campaign trail.

So why are we here, Mr. Speaker? Why have we spent so much time and energy on a policy that does little to improve the hiring of Indigenous people and is hugely frustrating to Northerners. No matter the Minister's intention, Mr. Speaker, the results are clear to Northerners: You aren't valued, you aren't wanted, and you aren't a priority to this government.

I didn't think this needed to be said but as this government continues to make decisions that erode the advantages our people have enjoyed for 30 years or more, let me be clear: Every decision we make in this chamber should have one goal - Northerners first. We are sent here to solve problems, not to create them. By leaving so many gaps behind and non-Indigenous Northerners behind, we are actively adding to the challenges Northerners face every day in our communities. Working people deserve better, especially those in our public service and those aspiring to join it.

If you value -- so if you value the work of committees, then you must support this motion. If you value accountability, then you must support this motion. If you value the concerns of dozens of working people who contacted their MLAs to reject these policy changes, then you must support this motion. If you value consensus government and working together and listening to one another, you must support this motion. And if you want to put Northerners first where they belong, you must support this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. To the motion. Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Masi, Mr. Speaker. No disrespect, I sympathize with my colleague and I hear the concerns that have been raised. I believe this Indigenous employment policy will help Indigenous people in the NWT. The Minister has said 56 percent of -- 56 percent of employees currently -- currently categorized as P2 work in Yellowknife. Mr. Speaker, what I take from this is that most P2s live in the city or larger regional centre. Their family members will always have a job to apply for and access to good education. I have heard numerous times from former teachers in Tlicho region that once their children were old enough to start elementary school, they moved to Yellowknife for better options. However, Indigenous people, Indigenous young people, and families in small communities, do not have these options. We lack a lot of services in small communities. Some of our young people feel hopeless. Drugs are getting in, and the future generations is going to face addictions. I want change. I want to help solve these problems. I support a policy that is aimed at recruiting Indigenous employees from within present boundaries of the territory. So for this reason, I will not support this motion. Masi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. To the motion. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too do have a problem with the GNWT affirmative action policy. It was created back when we were part of Nunavut and at the time it was done in a way that it catered to everybody that's working here in the Northwest Territories - P1, P2, P3. But my concern, Mr. Speaker, is that when this announcement came out when Cabinet made a decision, I was surprised to hear it as well that decision came from Cabinet. I got calls from my leaders, my community members, and members from different ridings of the Northwest Territories expressing their concerns about how could this be. When this announcement came out, they were going to say that aboriginal hires are going to be from people from southern Canada. So in other words, if the aboriginal person that has a degree in education come into Fort Resolution to fill a job in recreation, they get first priority. And our guy in the community who's been born and raised here would be left out for applying on that job. So I am concerned with that. But then when they went back and they made changes saying oh jeez, now we're going to change it. It's going to be that aboriginal people are going to be first hire and then southern people after that. I don't support this motion. I mean, I -- I don't support the idea of bringing forward an aboriginal policy. There are a lot of

good people that I spoke to that created the GNWT affirmative action policy. And it's been in place for over 30 years. It wasn't perfect. There were problems, and I agree with that. There should have been an oversight on that. I know a lot of good people applied on jobs, and they were missed out on jobs because there was just -- just the way it was at the time where there were problems identified. And I've raised this on an issue.

In the 19th Assembly, I was on a committee that went up and down the Valley. My colleague from Monfwi was part of that committee. Cabinet Minister across the road there was on that committee. And we heard from our people in the Northwest Territories that to increase the aboriginal numbers in the GNWT, we have to take a look at these policies. So now this motion is here today. I keep thinking about it because I got calls from members -- I can paint an old car, even though it's broken down, everything, paint it, I'm going to try to sell it. It's still an old car. This policy, I'm deeply concerned. If we can't implement the affirmative action policy after 30 years and fix the problems, then what do you think we're going to do with this policy? Is it going to be any better? I don't think so. It's going to be another 30 years before we finally catch up, figure what the problems are.

I wish we had more time to talk about this, but Cabinet made a decision. There was no consultation or accommodation with Indigenous governments throughout the Northwest Territories or groups throughout the Northwest Territories. They have a right to be heard. So this policy that the Minister of Finance announced, I can't support that policy. My chiefs were never consulted. The leaders of the Northwest Territories were never consulted. Cabinet brought this forward in the 19th Assembly as well. It didn't go anywhere. So here today I support this motion. We could fix it but let's do it right.

Right now, I come here to work for my people and my region, the communities throughout the Northwest Territories, and it seems like we have no voice because Cabinet continues to make decisions on the best interests of the people in the Northwest Territories with no consultation or accommodation. And do you think this policy now it's going to forward, aboriginal policy? There's going to be problems with it. Why were we sitting at a committee, go up and down the Valley to listen to people, and then we -- this policy comes out. Then what happens to all the hard work we did? It's out the door.

I'm not going to tell how my colleagues to vote on this one here, but I'm going to ask them to vote with your heart because at the end of the

day I'm worried about my grandchildren and their other grandchildren. So if we can't increase the aboriginal hire in government and then we change the policy and call it a different name, the issues are still going to be there. We should have an oversight committee independent on all the hire, on all the appeals. That's what I said in the 19th Assembly when we did the committee on the -- I can't remember what the bill number is, but we did the work. We did a lot of good work that time. So I'm deeply concerned that here we are today talking about this. And if -- if this thing goes ahead, then what does that say to all the work we do in committee? It's all for nothing.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to support this motion on behalf of my constituents who have issues still trying to find jobs in government. And it's time that we start listening to the people here in the Northwest Territories and take their voices and their issues and their concerns when we make decisions in this House. But this decision came without the consent of our own colleagues here; it just happened. We were caught off guard on that. So, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to support this motion for my people in my riding. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh. To the motion. Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot support a return to the old affirmative action policy. But I also cannot give me wholehearted endorsement of the new Indigenous employment policy because I do not believe it can achieve its intended objectives.

Mr. Speaker, if this motion is asking me to take a position on which one do I support, the affirmative action policy or the Indigenous employment policy, I will do neither because I believe we are having the wrong conversation entirely.

The few constituents who did reach out to me about the Indigenous employment policy expressed a common concern, and I think it was summed up well by one constituent who said, what I have not seen or heard is anything that addresses why the existing affirmative action hiring policy failed to improve the representation of Indigenous northerners. Changing the existing policy without addressing the reasons for failure would seem to miss the mark. Northern Indigenous applicants already are priority 1. That policy has been in place for over 30 years and has little to no effect. If the root cause is not addressed, a new policy has little chance of success.

My conclusion, Mr. Speaker, is that too much attention and airtime has been given to debating the government's policy on hiring priorities and not enough attention has been given to the biggest barriers that Indigenous people and other marginalized groups actually face in securing good jobs with the government. I want to talk about how we can support community learning, new approaches to K to 12 education, adult education that meets people where they're at, effective and culturally appropriate mental health supports at every age, innovative approaches to addictions treatment. I want to talk about how even when Indigenous individuals and people from marginalized groups get hired by the GNWT, there are barriers to them moving up in their careers, so many get discouraged and leave the government. I want to talk about more flexible and responsive professional development, mentorship, and mental health supports within GNWT workplaces. I want to talk about ways the GNWT can make its workplaces more welcoming and accommodating to people with disabilities. We should also be talking more about how lived experience and knowledge of Indigenous culture and northern communities is or can be accounted for in evaluating someone's qualifications when they apply for a job.

I also want to acknowledge that many Indigenous residents may not want to work for the GNWT regardless of how much the government wants them. Many are choosing to devote their talents instead to working with their own Indigenous governments or development corporations, and there's no reason that the GNWT should be trying or coming up with strategies to lure Indigenous Northerners away from Indigenous government employers.

I've also heard from constituents about a number of barriers facing northern-born students who want to return home to work, including sometimes specialized jobs are not available, sometimes salaries are not competitive. But, again, these cannot be solved by a priority hiring policy.

Mr. Speaker, this motion offers me a chance to take a position between going back to the affirmative action policy or accepting the Indigenous employment policy, and I choose neither. I want to have entirely different conversations. So for that reason, I will be abstaining on this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate my colleague from Yellowknife North's position. I share a lot of her sentiments when it comes to the underlying causes of why we don't see more Indigenous representation in our public service.

Mr. Speaker, if we keep what we have -- if we keep what we have always had, then we will keep getting what we've always got. I'm going to say a little bit of what I said at the briefing earlier this week because I had to rush through my comments due to time constraints; I don't have that here.

My colleague from Monfwi is relentless, with good reason, when she speaks about education for youth. Improving our educational outcomes are how you change the workforce in the long term. It's crucial we don't forget this. Systemic changes to education access and outcomes can easily become generational and doesn't allow the GNWT to aim for better Indigenous representation right now. It's my -- if my Indigenous colleagues on the whole are comfortable with this amended IEP moving forward, I support them.

What I do want to state unequivocally is that diversity, equity, and inclusion is fundamentally about prioritizing equity for underrepresented groups within the employer, especially underrepresented groups that have historical barriers to employment. That is what affirmative action tried to accomplish but failed and what now IEP seeks to address.

I think there is value of having long-term Northerners in the public service, but I do not feel that they are underrepresented as an equity group. To say that they are is disingenuous.

At the public briefing with the Minister this week, I highlighted my main concern, which is what I hear from my constituents, around the lack of an employment equity policy going ahead at this time. When affirmative action ceases to exist on April 1, so goes preferential hiring for folks with disabilities, for example. This work was originally in scope for the reworking of an affirmative action policy but was halted due to public feedback. I fully accept that many people are not comfortable around self-identifying various characteristics about themselves in the hiring process. Sometimes this is extremely personal information that they don't wish to share, and it seems invasive. I'm still confident that the work can be done to ensure hiring equity for historically underrepresented folks is appropriate and inclusive. I have heard from the Minister and her staff that they continue to prioritize this work and, most importantly, will work with stakeholders on this work. At this

time, I'm satisfied that the GNWT is hearing that historical inequities need to be addressed. And if it means taking apart the functions of the original affirmative action policy and dealing with them one at a time, I am all right with this.

Back in January, I had a conversation after the letters from some Members to this -- to the Premier came out. And my friends told me this, and I want to share it with the House today: All equity work is frustrating. It triggers our most primal survival responses. When we are triggered, we are taught our options are flight, fight, freeze, and fawn. But we have another option, Mr. Speaker. Surrender. That seems to be a reoccurring lesson for me for the last few months. Surrendering is accepting what is and to give space to other people's stories, other people's truths. It is to know that my truth is not the objective truth. It's giving space for other people's stories to model for them how we give space for our own. The irony of race equity work is a constantly fighting not to become the very thing we're resisting. So I cannot speak to whether or not an Indigenous employment policy is right for Indigenous people. Only Indigenous people can do that, Mr. Speaker. And what I am hearing is they want to see this go ahead. So at this time, I will not support this motion.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, member from Great Slave. To the motion. Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's much disagreement in this room about the problem that is trying to be solved through implementation of this new policy. In fact, I haven't heard any disagreement about that, the problem of underrepresentation of Indigenous persons in the public service.

So to give a little bit of history on this, the department during the last term of the Assembly went out and did engagement with the public on changing the affirmative action policy and fixing the issues that are at hand. What came back was quite complex. It produced a lot of results with a number of different recommendations. And I would say that there was not a clear path identified which put the department in a difficult position. And I would note that much of what was said in that engagement was spoken to by the Member for Yellowknife North just now.

The various challenges that Indigenous persons and persons with disabilities, people in minority groups, face in terms of the barriers to their advancement within the government, to their entry into the workforce, education outcomes, which the Member for Monfwi has

spoken eloquently about and I agree with completely -- and I have more to say about education outcomes in a different item that we're considering today -- and so the department was faced with something difficult. How do we get at this issue? And they brought forward what we saw as the first iteration of the Indigenous employment policy. And so committee responded to that, wrote to the Minister. It ended up as was pointed out by other members -- wrote to the minister multiple times. First sort of critiquing the initial attempt and saying we wanted to engage further and consider other options. And one of the things that committee pointed out, that I'm going to speak to a bit further in a second here, is that the new Indigenous employment policy as presented addressed three out of the 17, 17 recommendations, that came out of the What We Heard report of the department's engagement on this issue. And so there -- even with this new policy are a huge number of gaps that still need to be filled. Again, the Member for Yellowknife North spoke well to those gaps, and so I don't want to stand here and repeat those.

And so the other thing that committee did is that, you know, with the department, ultimately we got -- we came to a place where committee wrote the Minister asking -- asking her to pause this process and say, you know, we need to do more work on this. And the committee also went out to the public and said now that the policy's out, what do you think. And committee received a significant number of responses, far more than we usually do. We received 50 written responses from the public raising a number of different issues, raising issues with the way the policy was being implemented, concerns about it, but in particular, noting again, the gaps in education, the gaps that are not being filled with this policy and all the different elements that lead to barriers to advancement and barriers to entry into jobs with the government. And so my main takeaway right now is that there is still a lot of work left to be done. And I would note that when the Minister came before committee just the other day, staff acknowledged that fact, acknowledged that there's a lot of work to do, acknowledged that when it comes to diversity and inclusion, all the groups that have been left out of the new policy, there's a lot of work left to be done.

And so what I've come away with from this process is just I don't really understand why this had to be rushed, why it had to be done now, considering that this is a policy that's 30 years old, it's taken a long time for us to get here, and why the Minister couldn't take more time to work with committee, help build consensus around a new policy and a set of actions and changes that we can all agree on that

comprehensively get at the various issue that is came up during engagement. And I think that's why we're having so much difficulty with this now, is that this policy as it stands alone doesn't solve all those problems.

And I want to acknowledge that there was some concession by the Minister. The Minister did change the policy to recognize that the real goal here, the real outcome that we're looking for is increased employment of Northerners, Indigenous Northerners in particular, from the territory or from groups represented in the territory if they didn't necessarily grow up here. And I don't disagree with that. I think it's a -- I think it's a good goal, and I think most people do. But where I do have concerns is all the folks who are left out and the 14 other recommendations that haven't been addressed by this particular policy.

Now, the Minister has ensured us, and the Minister's staff has ensured us, that work is ongoing on that and I appreciate that but, again, I still just don't understand why we couldn't bring forward something more holistic that acknowledges all these issues, particularly the one that I think, you know, was highlighted by the -- sorry, Mr. Speaker. The name is -- but something that's been highlighted is the enormous education gap between Indigenous youth and non-Indigenous youth in this territory and the fact that education outcomes are so different. I think that that is one of the key issues. We have got to get at that. And I certainly hope that that becomes one of the next big priorities of the Assembly, is addressing that issue head on.

So that's really where I'm left here. And as chair of the committee that wrote to the Minister multiple times, I would just say, you know, I'm standing in support of this motion today in good faith with Cabinet in the sense that what I'm really trying to say here is we wanted to work with Cabinet on developing a more fulsome solution. We wrote to Cabinet and asked to do that and were not met with -- with that willingness.

Now, I want to acknowledge a few things. The Minister has reached out to committee and suggested we form a working group and that we work on this issue on a go-forward basis. I appreciate that and certainly look forward to doing that work. The other thing I wanted to know is, you know, some of the questions that I asked yesterday in had the house were about how this is going to affect students. And I would just note that I think it'll bring some of my constituents a fair bit of comfort knowing that students that go away and have been educated in the territory and go off to university still come -- will still be able to receive a form of

preference hiring when they apply for the jobs in the Northwest Territories. And those are folks that I'm concerned about, people who are just entering their careers. So I appreciate that reassurance from the Minister. And, you know, I look forward in whichever way this goes down -- I look forward to working with the Minister further on this issue. We are certainly not done. There's a lot more work to be done as was highlighted by the Member for Yellowknife North, by Member for Monfwi, by all the Members who have spoken, that there's a lot more work to do. So I look forward to doing that work. And, again, I just say in good faith I support this motion asking for a pause as I had done as chair of the committee writing just saying, you know, we need to take more time to do this, and I certainly respect the Members who have come around and support the policy in its current form. Either way, always look forward to working with my colleagues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Member from Inuvik Range Lake -- or how about we try this, how about I moved Range Lake to Inuvik? Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we've had a lot of conversation around this issue. We've taken it back to our ridings for sure. I've had conversations with members in my riding. It ranged from agnostic, where it doesn't matter, it doesn't work anyway, to we want to see Northerners first, it should be about Indigenous people, and I've had also some people who are P2s coming in, and P2s, I've had a conversation with who have, by the way, been gainfully employed because they allegedly have letters after their name where they've got the education, they've been working in the North a long time and, indeed, helped build the North and have been paid to help build the North, and have done quite well for themselves and are going to stay here and enjoy the benefits of living in the North. But for me, Mr. Speaker, this has to be about Indigenous employment, period. That, for me, Mr. Speaker is what it's about. It's about having a policy and, more importantly, following that policy. Some of our issues around affirmative action, as again, we've had this thing for 30 years. It hasn't really worked. We have a 1 percent unemployment rate in non-Indigenous and a 14 percent unemployment with Indigenous. So something is not working. So we need to make a change. Do I agree 100 percent with the -- you know, with the new Indigenous employment policy? No. And I've had several conversations with the Minister about that. She's been kind enough to sit down and answer some questions.

One of the concerns I did have in my riding was that it has to be northern Indigenous first. That's a change that was made and that was a change that was explained when we had our public hearing on that earlier this week. That was, likely for me, Mr. Speaker, the number one issue that I had heard in my riding, that it has to be northern Indigenous first.

I don't know if the new policy's going to be better than the old one. I do know the old one hasn't been working. And we have stats to show that. I don't think this is going to have a huge impact on non-Indigenous. Again, the stats don't lie. If you look at the unemployment rate, surely you can see that. I do think there are gaps in our system, and I'm -- you know, for me, it's about equivalencies. It's about people that are working in the government, Indigenous people working in the government that have been in roles for a long time -- and I've said this before -- have equivalencies, so have done the job, but yet not gotten that additional promotion to get them at that next level, the senior level. Instead you've brought in other people to do that job. May or may not have been from the territory, may not have worked out. Again, the person acts in that position for a long time, but the equivalencies aren't being recognized either because the policy's not being followed correctly or there's lateral violence, there's things that happens within the workforce. But people, there's that gap that people are sat there, that should be promoted, that are Indigenous people that aren't, and that's likely the biggest concern for me, Mr. Speaker. That's where I see a gap that has to be filled and has to be looked at.

Can the new policy do that? I mean, I hope so. For me, we have to try and do something different. And it's a policy, and I appreciate that the -- you know, the Minister has talked about a working group that we can work on this together with committee, with Cabinet, with the Minister's department, to find out, indeed, if this is working, if something can work better than the policy that we know hasn't worked for 30 years. I think everyone in this room has either mentioned that or agreed to that, that what we had has not been working. And so to try something different -- and if the new policy doesn't work, then we go back and we try something again. But, again, I -- you know, for me, it's about Indigenous employment. That's the goal here. It's what we're trying to do here. That's what I've heard in my riding, that people want to hear, it's about how do we -- and we're just talking in the public service here of course, Mr. Speaker, how do we increase Indigenous employment in public service. The policy we have hasn't gotten us there.

So, Mr. Speaker, I mean -- and, again, like, we need workers. I mean, listen, if -- to be a nurse or to be a teacher or to be a doctor or to be an accountant, to be a lab tech, you have to have those qualifications so it doesn't matter, you know, who you are, Mr. Speaker, you have to have that. We're not talking about positions -- and we need those in every jurisdiction right now. We know that. I mean, we're looking to bring people in. We're bringing agency nurses in. We're -- like, we need -- we need people. We have, you know -- so, again, for me, our focus has to be in the public service on Indigenous employment.

Mr. Speaker, as my friend from Monfwi had said, I'm willing to give this a shot, the new policy. I think committee needs to work with the government on this to ensure that if there's an opportunity in the IEP that we're taking full of advantage of that, that we're actually implementing and following up on the policies as they are presented. Because, again, I think, Mr. Speaker, that's been one of the things that we haven't done a good job within the past. So willing to give that an opportunity.

I appreciate what my colleague from Yellowknife Centre, Yellowknife -- Range Lake as well. I mean, yeah, and I've heard some of those -- some of those concerns in my riding as well. But the overwhelming thing I heard in my riding was that it has to be Indigenous northern first, and that's the change that the Minister has made, and I'm willing to give this a shot, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. To the motion. Member from the Sahtu.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This policy is a revised policy from the 30-year-old one. And I've seen a number of changes in the positions, northern Indigenous positions, in the Sahtu. I recall years ago we never had a regional superintendent from the region. Now we do, so that tells me that things have changed since way back then. However there's always room for improvements on efficiencies, and certainly similar to this policy and every policy that this government has, it's only good as the implementation. And if you want to measure that success, then we can do a survey, an analysis on the improvements to measure the policy is actually working, whether it's this one or others. And certainly, Mr. Speaker, this policy has really created an opening door of reviews and efficiencies and What We Heard engagements from the public. We've got that. As previous speakers mentioned, there's parts of recommendations that are identifying missing gaps. So to that, moving forward for the remaining term of this

Assembly, opens the doors for further collaboration on efficiencies. And I'm also mindful that the multi-jurisdictions of our Northwest Territories is different in the Sahtu, similar to the other three neighboring settlement areas, have various provisions of government benefits to the beneficiaries of the land claim. So given that, and also being respectful on what we had said the beginning of this Assembly, there's going to be days that we are here today, making a decision on what you think is right for the people that put you in this House. But, also, I'm mindful of outside the land claim. This policy is a territorial one, not a land claim one, but it also applies to the jurisdiction I represent.

Now if we look at efficiencies and reviews and say okay, well, can we improve that, as my colleague from Boot Lake mentioned okay, you got 1 percent and you got 14 percent. Okay, those are numbers to sit back and say okay, let's analyze this; why isn't this working. So there's certainly room for improvements. To make my long presentation short, I'm willing to give this new policy a chance. However, I want a midterm review to the remaining term of our Assembly. We can say midterm, or we can say an annual review; is it really working come next fiscal year. Let's look at it. Don't develop a policy and put it on the desk and it stays there. So for the record, I'm willing to give this new revised policy a chance, and let's tweak it, let's improve it, and let's move on. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. To the motion. Member from Yellowknife South.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a policy whose purpose is to improve equity must focus on areas where there is inequity. To be effective, we need to ask ourselves who is not being treated with equity if we're going to make a difference. And so, Mr. Speaker, that is now the focus of the new Indigenous employment policy. It is focusing on those persons who we know have not been -- historically and systemically been treated with equity in the Northwest Territories and also in Canada. The policy, though, is and always has been about hiring for the GNWT for the Northwest Territories, and it has focused always, and intended always, to benefit support Indigenous persons living in the Northwest Territories. Some of those Indigenous people who live here, who reached out to the GNWT during the course of our engagement, are not Members of the Indigenous Nations who find themselves -- Indigenous First Nations and Inuit and Metis who are within the present boundaries of the Northwest Territories. Some of them are from communities that may straddle

the boundary. Others have moved here or maybe were born here and are Members of Indigenous Nations from elsewhere in Canada. And the Indigenous employment policy, after the engagement sessions, was meant to capture that in a very simple and focused way.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we went through a fairly extensive engagement process. It did not begin this Assembly. Arguably, it did not even begin last Assembly because for 30 years, perhaps for the reasons we are all here speaking today, this policy has been political and not one on which it is easy to find consensus. So back all the way in 2005, work was done to try to review the policy to update it because we're out of step with the rest of Canada. No one else is doing affirmative action policies anymore. But we just can't seem to change this one. 2014 it comes forward again. Just can't get it over the line. Can't agree, and it gets ended, it gets stopped.

So we move it forward last government and did an extensive engagement. There were special theme days in this House about human resources and hiring of Indigenous people, I believe not just once but more than once. It was one of the hottest topics in this building in the last government about hiring Indigenous people into the public service. And so the engagement process that we embarked on involved Indigenous -- the NWT Council of Leaders, the IGC Secretariat, multiple in-person sessions in multiple communities, the Indigenous Employment Advisory Committee, multiple outreaches directly to myself as well as to other Members. Mr. Speaker, one of our standing committees in the 19th Assembly also engaged, at length, in human resources, examining how they could better match the fact that we are not representing the Northwest Territories in the government's public service. Members of this room are -- were on that committee. And that brings, of course, to where we are today and the What We Heard report and looking at how we were going to try our best to find a path forward on something that is not easily agreed upon because it does touch on a deep inequity in our society that is reflected in the public service. But that inequity is much deeper than just the public service, and this public service hiring policy will not fix it by itself. But we can be honest about it.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we did almost a year ago, in fact, March of last year, go with this new Assembly to standing committee and presented on the proposed changes, received letters. And, Mr. Speaker, I don't actually want this to be about the back and forth of that. I am -- I've been to committee now several times and have noted and will say here I regret the falling out that we have had on this policy. It didn't have to be that way, and I acknowledge that. And it



shouldn't be that. That is, in fact, very rare in terms of how this House and all 19 of us speak and collaborate. Whether it's about policies, legislation, the budget, it is not generally how we do things, that there is such a deep divide between us. I am regretful that that's the situation we find ourselves in. But we did go back and the department I believe made efforts to answer the concerns that were being raised about the policy, because the concerns that are being raised about the policy are not just about the words on the page of how we screen in candidates to be in public service. The bigger issues are about education, education outcomes, schools, training, racism, unconscious bias, cultural training, language. Those are the really big issues, and they're difficult. So we did appear again and tried to provide detail about the Indigenous recruitment and retention framework because that, along with the diversity and inclusion framework, with the human resources -- the strategic plans, the cultural training, the context that we are trying to create -- the culture that we are trying to create within human resources has changed, and I hope is changing. There is an entire suite of things that we are rolling out over the last few years. This is now but one policy, not the only policy, that is meant to govern and direct how we behave and how we act in human resources vis-a-vie the creation of a public service that is more inclusive, more diverse, and more reflective of the public that we serve.

And so, Mr. Speaker, the Indigenous employment policy now is one that focuses on equity, but it is, again, not one that is meant to focus only on southern hires or one group -- or one group of Indigenous persons. It really is now focusing, with amendments, on, of course, firstly and foremost, those Indigenous people who have the tie to a community or a group or nation within the present boundaries of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, I've had questions about why that back and forth. Again, we were trying to be inclusive of all Indigenous people in the Northwest Territories and just be simple and direct, but I recognize, and we should all recognize, that we have treaty obligations. We have treaty obligations to nations within the present boundaries that we are in, and we're going to respect them and we're going to put those as being a priority tier. But then we wanted to make sure that there's all the other people who are Indigenous Canadians living here who may not be members of those groups but who we still want to see reflected in had the public service.

And, Mr. Speaker, the most recent public hearing that I had the opportunity to attend just a few days ago with my colleagues from the

standing committee, after which I did receive feedback from the public service, from a member of the public service directly to me, who is a member of the public service, who is an Indigenous Canadian, who is not a member of one of the groups from the present boundaries of the Northwest Territories. So I want all of the folks who may find themselves as Indigenous Canadians living here in the Northwest Territories to consider applying to the public service and to hopefully see that we want to prioritize their presence within the ranks of the public service.

Mr. Speaker, this is why we are implementing this policy. We want to be laser focused. We want to ensure that we are focusing on a group that has not seen equity and that has not benefitted.

There are some who have benefitted from the old affirmative action policy where there was priority given to women in nontraditional roles and, in this respect, the policy was successful. The percentage of women in the Government of the Northwest Territories has risen from 59.3 percent back in 2000 to now 65.5 percent of the public service are women. Since 2007, women's representation among senior management has nearly doubled. We are now at 61.4 percent women in the senior management. So it is fortunate, from that perspective, that this is no longer a group, and has not been for some time, that requires an equity approach in order to achieve equity. That's never to say that we don't want to continue to look for diversity and inclusion, but there are different tools that we can use to ensure that we maintain these gains.

And so, Mr. Speaker, it is interesting if we look too at the labour force. So women are actually slightly less than half of the labour force but make up almost two-thirds of the public service. They're not underrepresented. And so the affirmative action policy may have played a role in changing those numbers around over the last 25 years, but there's certainly no likewise improvements for people who identify as Indigenous Canadians.

But similarly, Mr. Speaker, there's no evidence to suggest that non-Indigenous Northerners are disadvantaged or in need of the priority hiring in order to gain employment within the public service. In 2024, the unemployment rate for Indigenous residents averaged 12 percent. It was at around 2 percent for non-Indigenous residents. Residents and employees are also, of course, now, we note, who may be having other identity features, who maybe have a -- maybe have a marginalized or a vulnerable group, maybe from a minority group, this is now a group that we do want to ensure see

themselves focused upon, that there are other more modern tools by which we can achieve that, and that's the diversity -- the work of the diversity and inclusion unit within the Department of Finance. And, again, Mr. Speaker, the landscape that we operate in truly has changed and we hope will continue to change within human resources.

So we -- I would also take this chance, Mr. Speaker, to note that the duty to accommodate begins at the time that a person is applying for their position, not after. At the time that they are applying. Anyone who is qualified for a position should be able to apply for that job, feel themselves have that opportunity, have the ability to receive whatever accommodation might be necessary so that they can show that their skills, abilities, and qualifications meet the needs of the position. There should not be -- if we are truly a public service that is representative and inclusive, then we should be able to provide those accommodations in a proactive and positive way and not wait for people to have to self-identify.

There's work still to be done here, Mr. Speaker. There's no denying that. But that's the path that we want to be on. These are the values that we haven't to have in the Government of the Northwest Territories as our public service.

I also want to acknowledge that there are a number of processes to get at, again, some of the challenges that have been raised which is how we value and recognize the contribution of northern residents and northern knowledge. It's not necessarily determined by how long someone lives here. What we are doing now which has not been done in many the past, certainly not in a widespread or organized fashion and certainly not made as public as it is now, is changing some of our processes to reward and to categorize and prioritize northern knowledge as one of the skill sets that we would hire for. Northern values, northern experience, northern languages. We have 11 official languages, Mr. Speaker, and we could do an awfully good job now in recognizing that as a skill when we are hiring to build a workforce of people who appreciate the significance and importance of this territory, and it doesn't necessarily matter how long you've lived here. But we can include provisions when we begin our hiring for local knowledge in the job description. We can have a geographically limited competition if there's a concern around making sure that someone has a very specific knowledge and specific commitment and connection to a community. These are all tools that we can start to use.

And, Mr. Speaker, I know I've answered this many times, but if people are tuning in today,

the summer student program and the intern program is open to people who are ordinarily resident. Doesn't matter how long but at least ordinarily resident when they're coming back. Similarly, the SFA program is one that is also open to ordinary residents. So there are advantages for young people who may not -- may just be entering their career stage.

The new Indigenous employment policy does involve mandatory reporting as does the Indigenous recruitment and retention framework. There are targets that are broken down by division, by types of positions. And Mr. Speaker, that's a much different type of approach than just a blanket -- just a blanket decision about who -- how many numbers we want to get. We are trying to do a better job now, Mr. Speaker, of looking at the workforce, looking who is out there looking for work, who different groups may be, and when we do reporting and set targets, to do so in a much more measured and targeted way.

We will continue, Mr. Speaker, to engage Indigenous governments. Certainly over the last few months, I've had myself many conversations, personally I have the officials in the Department of Finance with representatives of Indigenous governments, about the importance and the value of prioritizing those groups who are here within the Northwest Territories first and foremost. And that is the amendment that was made and approved by Cabinet and that's now set to go out on April 1st.

But, again, Mr. Speaker, it is a whole package of cultural shift that we are putting forward, this being but one part.

I'm pleased to hear some mention of the offer that we've made to collaborate with the Standing Committee on Government Operations. As I say, I would like this to be something as we roll out, given the importance and the value of speaking about representing Indigenous people and getting to a place of equity with people who have been systemically disadvantaged and discriminated against, that we do that as a collective, that we have the opportunity to share and to learn, and that some of the various tools that I'm describing and discussing don't have to be unknown. They should be better known, and we should be held to use them. That is the ideal, Mr. Speaker. Don't need to wait 30 years for review. Happy to do this over the course of the life of this government. Couldn't agree more. Being held to account for it can only be a good thing.

Mr. Speaker, my own riding is one that has a lot of public servants. It is one that is, I strongly suspect, not a majority Indigenous Canadian,

Mr. Speaker, and I've heard from my own residents on this. This notion that something's being taken away from them, Mr. Speaker, saddens me because it's not, in my view, what defines us as Northerners whether or not you have access to a priority attempt to maybe get a job. Mr. Speaker, it is not what defines us as Northerners. What defines us as Northerners is our connection to this place, our connection to the land, our connection to friends and to family and to neighbours. That's why -- certainly why I think most people live here and why they have opportunities here, why there's such a strong connection by many here.

Mr. Speaker, I had yesterday the opportunity to meet with the Arctic Economic Council that was visiting here in Yellowknife, and they were asking about, you know, why people are living here and what their connections are. Mr. Speaker, from what I was hearing, and certainly from the reaction that most people would give, it's not because there's the possibility that there might someday be the advanced screening on a GNWT public servant's job. Mr. Speaker, I hope that we don't get to that place, that's the reason people are living here. There's so much more in the North to keep people here, to bring them here, and to bring them home.

So, Mr. Speaker, with that, this a policy of the Government of the Northwest Territories. It's a policy of Cabinet. It has been reviewed at length. It's been reviewed at length by many years, including by this Cabinet. And, again, we appreciate the feedback that was had since December to now, and that's why the changes were made as they were to reflect our northern Indigenous context and the treaty obligations and connections we have to treaty -- northern government. But with that, Mr. Speaker, in light of it, Cabinet will be voting against this motion. Thank you

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife South. To the motion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question's been called. Does the Member from Yellowknife Centre wish to conclude debate?

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I was quite shocked by the last statement by the finance Minister that Cabinet was going to vote against this motion because, I mean, tradition has it that when we provide motions, they're treated as advice and they abstain from motions. So this is clearly a sense of maybe -- I don't know, is it a new form of working as a party? I mean, they never vote against motions. And it's very -- it's a disappointment. So when they talk about working together, this would

have just been heeded as advice. And the Premier can laugh all he wants about this but, I mean, maybe this is an impression of what maybe party politics is happening under the skin or under the guise or under whatever; I don't know.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Yeah, there we go.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Member from Hay River North has a point of order. Member from Hay River North.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What it sounded like to me is the Member was imputing motives stating that, you know, this is an attempt at party politics and we're working as a party. I will let you know that I will never in this Assembly work as -- in a party system or strive to work in a party system or support a party system. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. HAWKINS:** Well, I appreciate the Premier's creative imagination, but I wasn't formalizing there's a party politics. I was talking about the guise of the government collaborating together in a manner that they never do. So the Premier does have an imagination on this particular guard, I didn't specifically make that illustration clear enough, and I didn't say the party of one that already acts like that. I mean, I am making a clear point of the impression. So he can be creative in his thoughts and his imagination but he's completely wrong. Thank you.

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

Colleagues, I'm going to have to review what was actually said with the Hansard and that before I make a formal decision on this. But, colleagues, please remember when we're in this House debating that we are respectful to one another and that we move forward in a positive manner so that we can have honest debate here. Thank you. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I look forward to your ruling when it does come, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the latest revision of this particular policy by the government has eked out seven Members of this side of the House spoke against it. Guess what happens? The typical going down the hall or whatever the calls are

made, I mean, how do you describe this (audio) --

**MR. SPEAKER:** (audio) on the motion. Thank you. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** And hence, Mr. Speaker, we have the policy now before us and that's why this motion is coming forward. Mr. Speaker, I have asked different times at committee when did they review the affirmative action policy. They have not. There's no answers. That's why this motion exists. Mr. Speaker, the Premier and everyone else can talk about the impacts on these people -- on folks, but there are equity groups that are being impacted by this. That's why it needs to go back to committee.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't the -- there was at least four letters that said slow down, have consultation. That's what this motion's all about.

Mr. Speaker, as the motion and my colleagues have said, many Indigenous governments feel steamrolled by this process, this drive-by consultation. Back in 2022, there was never a detailed consultation as to what you're getting. That's why this motion is being sent back, Mr. Speaker.

At the heart of the issue, as I said in my original comment, this is about problems with education, as people mentioned the credentials, job opportunities, and even, let us not forget, not everyone wants to work for the GNWT.

Mr. Speaker, the affirmative action program wasn't meant to solve every problem but what worked in it allowed -- there were things that could have worked, and we could have modified the current policy to fix the small gaps. And, sure, there may have been larger gaps; that's true. But we wouldn't know because it's never been reviewed.

Now it's often been brought why it needs to go back, brought up as the issue of it needs to go back because oh my goodness, if we don't follow the new direction of the government, it's unconstitutional, yet unproven other than a statement, Mr. Speaker.

So specific to committee comments, you know, the policy may never have been perfect but, ultimately, the affirmative action policy was an important foundation in the North. That's why it needs to go back to committee to talk about it. The EIP program isn't making things better. It's just a reinvention of something that I'm not sure what's happening.

Mr. Speaker, sure, I agree that we could do better. We've heard people say that their Indigenous colleagues, they want to follow their

direction. Some have said yes. Some will say they support this motion going back to committee. Mr. Speaker, much work has to be done, as pointed out by Member for Frame Lake, hence it needs to go back to the committee.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't -- this current policy of the affirmative action program hasn't made things worse. The problem is is the application hasn't had the reviews and statistics and measurements as my colleague from the Sahtu has pointed out are key. So, Mr. Speaker, that's why it needs to go back. Mr. Speaker, the Minister says this isn't an -- or equity policy. Yes, you know, if it was, then we'd be talking about something different. She's right that there might be Northerners who are Indigenous but not Indigenous to the Northwest Territories who are impacted by the current policy of the affirmative action policy. But there's nothing stopping us from editing that and making that contribution acknowledged.

Mr. Speaker, I like the fact that she pointed out that women -- statistics on women in the government employment sector have increased. Fantastic. Empowering people. Mr. Speaker, taking away P2s is not disenfranchising Northerners because they came after them. So this new policy rendition doesn't change anything. It doesn't fix anything either.

Mr. Speaker, she highlighted in 2005 -- in 2014, which actually I happened to be there at the same time, I can tell you right now that everybody fought for the recognition of long-term Northerners, and even the finance Ministers of those days were Indigenous fighting for long-term Northerners to ensure that they get appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, the finance Minister pointed out this work was, you know, some of it or maybe largely or whatnot or you can say it's a continuation, but it's a lot of work was done last term. So back to my point my colleague from Range Lake had said, there was no mandate. So are we just simply doing the work of the last term because the Minister didn't get it through in the last time? I mean, it sort of makes you wonder what's the value of elections if the Cabinet's going to just keep dredging up old work that used to be done. We had a reset a year and a half ago. And, again, it wasn't in the mandate as pointed out. It wasn't in the Minister letters that isn't pointed out. It wasn't even on the campaign trail by anybody, Mr. Speaker.

There's frustration abound. That's why this needs to be done. There have been many P1s who have told me that they don't want to see this lost. I agree there are ways to fix the current

policy which is exactly why it needs to go back. My colleague from Tu Nedhe, you know, brought up the issue of what's the point of committee advice if it's just going to be ignored? It makes you wonder what is happening.

Mr. Speaker, to wrap up this is that what it does is it creates a new format that we're trying to solve southern Indigenous hiring problems. I support northern Indigenous empowerment hiring opportunities, whether it's education or jobs. I've always held the line that I would do what I can to be a champion of the causes and certainly a champion of their success. And that doesn't change today. To my last breath, I'll be working to support the North, its people, its Indigenous people. But it feels like when we have such overwhelming criticism, it makes you wonder are we not following the direction of the people, or are we following the direction of the finance Minister and Cabinet?

Mr. Speaker, the people of the North don't like this. The finance Minister likes this. The Cabinet likes this. And it's been tweaked in a manner that a few of my Indigenous colleagues feel like at least their groups are protected. And I'm glad it can be. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on that note, I will heed your advice and finish with this is frustrating, this is divisive, and it's been led by the government, and our committee colleagues wanted to be part of the solution. This is how we get it back on track, working together. Thank you very much.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Member from Yellowknife Centre has requested a recorded vote. All those in favour, please stand.

#### RECORDED VOTE

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):** Member for Yellowknife Centre. The Member for Range Lake. The Member for Frame Lake. The Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

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

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):** The Member for Inuvik Boot Lake. The Member for Monfwi. The Member for Great Slave. The Member for Mackenzie Delta. The Member for Thebacha. The Member for Yellowknife South. The Member for Kam Lake. The Member for Hay River North. The Member for Hay River South. The Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. The Member for Nunakput. The Member for Deh Cho. The Member for Sahtu.

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

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):** The Member for Yellowknife North.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Those in favour, 4. Opposed, 13. One abstention. The motion is defeated.

---Defeated

Colleagues, we will take a brief recess to deal with the other motions. We have to give the translators a bit of a break. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

**MR. SPEAKER:** Motions. Member from Yellowknife North.

#### Motions

MOTION 52-20(1):  
STRENGTHENING SUPPORT FOR NURSES  
AND HEALTHCARE WORKERS,  
CARRIED AS AMENDED

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS nurses and healthcare workers deliver essential healthcare services to residents of the Northwest Territories, including in rural and remote communities that present challenging operating conditions;

AND WHEREAS the delivery of quality health care in the Northwest Territories depends on a stable, well-supported workforce of regulated healthcare professionals, including nurses and allied health workers;

AND WHEREAS healthcare workers are suffering from increased workloads and staffing shortages that contribute to low morale, burnout, and reduced staff retention which in turn leads to disruptions in continuity of patient care;

AND WHEREAS management practices of the Northwest Territories healthcare system are currently under review through the appointment of a public administrator;

AND WHEREAS recruitment and retention of nurses and healthcare workers remain a serious challenge and require proactive review of management and labour policies to ensure fair treatment, safe working conditions, and adequate professional support to improve working conditions and job satisfaction;

AND WHEREAS access to health care and addressing the effects of trauma is a priority of the 20th Assembly;

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the Member for Monfwi, that the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly undertake a

comprehensive review of healthcare management practices, bargaining structures and labour policies, in consultation with nurses, labour unions, independent professional associations, frontline healthcare workers, and other key stakeholders to identify and recommend measures that:

- (i) reinforce workplace protections for nurses and healthcare workers, including improved work-life balance initiatives, competitive compensation, and mental health supports;
- (ii) address management practices that contribute to low workplace morale, fostering a supportive and collaborative working environment;
- (iii) strengthen recruitment and retention strategies for nurses and healthcare staff through focused incentives and stable workforce planning;
- (iv) increase accountability in the administration of health care in the Northwest Territories to ensure that policies reflect the realities of frontline work and lead to real improvements in working conditions in all healthcare settings including hospitals, health centres and health cabins;

AND FURTHER, that the Legislative Assembly engage thoroughly with labour unions, professional associations, health agencies and Indigenous governments to ensure that these measures accurately reflect the needs of healthcare workers in the Northwest Territories;

AND FURTHERMORE, that the comprehensive review of health care management practices, bargaining structures and labour policies be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Development for further study.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. The motion is in order. To the motion. Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to thank the Member for Monfwi for seconding the motion, and I want to thank the Member for Range Lake for coming up with the idea for this motion in the first place, as a way to show nurses and healthcare workers that we see their struggle. We see the pain that they endure amidst staff shortages and increased demands trying to keep our healthcare system afloat and do right by the patients that they try to help day after day after night after night.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot run a good quality healthcare system if the majority of our nurses

and doctors are temporary contract workers. We need a stable workforce who live in our communities, know their patients, understand cultural safety, and understand who else to reach out to within our health and social services system to make referrals and help patients access the more wholistic supports they need. Temporary workers just can't do those things well.

Now, we've spoken many times in this House about the need for healthcare worker recruitment and retention. We've talked about policies and strategies and statistics, the cost of agency nurses and contract workers in terms of our budget and the health authority's deficit, but we rarely put our healthcare workers themselves at the centre of the solution. We rarely give them a platform to have their voices heard, to have their ideas considered, to let them be co-designers of the system we want to see, to empower them to be leaders in healthcare system reform.

Mr. Speaker, I am a Member of the Standing Committee on Social Development -- I am the seconder of this motion -- the Member from Monfwi is the chair. And the committee has already identified it wants to broadly examine how to make our entire healthcare system more sustainable.

This motion is asking the committee to take a deeper dive into examining healthcare recruitment and retention from the perspective of its workers, to hear from them directly so that our recommendations better reflect the realities of frontline workers.

The committee, of course, should focus on the things that we as MLAs have some control or influence over - our government and health authority's policies and management practices and our own government's legislation, including how we legislate bargaining structures and regulation of health care professionals. I look forward to hearing from my colleagues on how they envision this Assembly and our committees moving forward to address this important issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MOTION TO AMEND MOTION 52-20(1):  
STRENGTHENING SUPPORT FOR NURSES  
AND HEALTHCARE WORKERS – FIFTH  
CLAUSE OF PREAMBLE,  
CARRIED

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am making a motion to amend Motion 52-20(1), strengthening support for nurses and healthcare workers.

I MOVE, seconded by the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, to amend Motion 52-20(1), strengthening support for nurses and healthcare workers, by adding the words "the employer's" between the words "of" and "management" in the fifth clause of the preamble, such that the clause reads:

AND WHEREAS recruitment and retention of nurses and healthcare workers remain a serious challenge and require proactive review of the employer's management and labour policies to ensure fair treatment, safe working conditions, and adequate professional support to improve working conditions and job satisfaction.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Great Slave. The motion to a -- or the motion to amend the motion is in order. The question before the House is now the amendment debate must be on the amendment and not the main motion. To the motion. Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this amendment and the two that follow are simply to clarify that it is not the intent of the motion to interfere with how the union conducts its internal business. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will support the amendment as it was always my intention for the committee to focus its work on the government's own legislation and policies. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. To the motion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question has been called. The motion to amend the motion, all those in favour? All those opposed? All those abstaining? The motion has passed to the motion as amended.

---Carried

Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MOTION TO AMEND MOTION 52-20(1), AS  
AMENDED: STRENGTHENING SUPPORT  
FOR NURSES AND HEALTHCARE  
WORKERS – FIRST CLAUSE,  
CARRIED

I MOVE, seconded by the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, to amend Motion 52-20(1),

Strengthening Support for Nurses and Healthcare Workers as amended, by adding the words "the employer's" between the words "practices" and "bargaining" in the first clause, such that the clause reads:

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the Member for Monfwi, that the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly undertake a comprehensive review of health care management practices, the employer's bargaining structures and labour policies, in consultation with nurses, labour unions, independent professional associations, frontline healthcare workers, and other key stakeholders to identify and recommend measures that:

(i) reinforce workplace protections for nurses and healthcare workers, including improved work-life balance initiatives, competitive compensation, and mental health supports;

(ii) address management practices that contribute to low workplace morale, fostering a supportive and collaborative working environment;

(iii) strengthen recruitment and retention strategies for nurses and health care staff through focused incentives and stable workforce planning; and

(iv) increase accountability in the administration of health care in the Northwest Territories to ensure that policies reflect the realities of frontline work and lead to real improvements in working conditions in all health care settings including hospitals, health centres and health cabins.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Great Slave. The motion to amend the motion is in order. The question before the House is now the amendment debate must be on the amendment and not the main motion. To the motion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question has been called. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? The motion's passed as amended, to the motion as amended.

---Carried

Member from Great Slave.

MOTION TO AMEND MOTION 52-20(1), AS  
AMENDED: STRENGTHENING SUPPORT  
FOR NURSES AND HEALTHCARE  
WORKERS – THIRD CLAUSE,  
CARRIED

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last one.

I MOVE, seconded by the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, to amend Motion 52-20(1), Strengthening Support for Nurses and Healthcare Workers, as amended, by adding the words "the employer's" between the words "practices" and "bargaining" in the third clause, such that the clause reads:

AND FURTHERMORE, that the comprehensive review of healthcare management practices, the employer's bargaining structures, and labour policies, be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Development for further study.

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

**MS. REID:** I don't have anything further to add, simply just that these amendments are to clarify what I have previously stated. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was going to let this one go but I think to be true to myself, I had mentioned in committee -- and this is when we talk about trying to figure out ways to work collaboratively -- I felt that this type of direction to the standing committee is actually a disappointment, a waste of time, in my perspective, because you don't need the House of Members referring it to yourself. And if this work already going on in the committee or work that's anticipated to go on in the committee that's known, it seems unusual the House would have to refer to itself. It's not a direction of government. And in my sort of -- I'll call it straw poll of around the room of support for this initiative at large, it seems unusual that if everyone supports it, why are we going to the House to pass a motion to say we're sending it to ourselves in committee? It just seems like the weirdest experience that I've seen in my -- what am I at here? 16 now? Something like that. No, longer than that. No, not yet, almost. Anyway, that's how frustrating and exhausting this is getting, this process.

So Mr. Speaker, this is -- this motion in some ways is confusing in the sense of I think it's misplaced because the committee's already agreed that this is going. So I mean, I think -- I

don't know what to say; it just seems wrong. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. To the motion. Member from Frame Lake.

We are debating the amendment. Okay, sorry, to debating the amendment. To the amendment.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question has been called. All those in favour of the amendment as presented? Opposed? Abstentions? The motion has passed.

---Carried

Members, please return to Motion 52-20(1) as amended. To the motion as amended. Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Mr. Speaker, I do support this motion because, at this time, we are having difficult times to retain and to hire nurses and other medical professionals in small communities. This motion is good. It will help meet the needs and to support the nurses and other professionals, other health professionals, to help these nurses and health professionals who wants to make -- who wants to live in the small communities, make small communities or make NWT their home. So I do support this motion. Hopefully it will help alleviate lots of problems that -- the challenges that we are facing and I'm sure the nurses are facing as well, you know, it's -- in small communities. I'm worried about the small communities because if we don't have any nurses in small communities, we're going to conform to having more agency nurses. And I think this motion is really going to help the nurses meet their needs. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. To the motion as amended. Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's been a long day already, so I'm just going to be very brief. I spoke quite extensively to my concerns about issues in the healthcare system and ways that we can go about solving them, and one of the key things that I shared at that time was listening to healthcare workers, listening to our frontline workers. And so I think that that is ultimately the aim of this motion. I think the motion speaks for itself. I'm in support of it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. To the motion. Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too stand in support of this motion. There's just -- there are a lot of nurses who live in my riding of Range Lake, and since even before we were elected, they were sharing their concerns with me at the doorsteps on the campaign trail. It's clear that what is going on in the health authority is just not working. It's not working for nurses. It's not working for physicians. It's not working for allied healthcare professionals. I think that we've heard a lot of these concerns. We've heard about agency nurses that are continuing to be a costly short-term solution that depletes morale and precious treasure, a hospital that's under gridlock half of the time every month, health and safety issues where staff are still waiting for the proper security procedures to be implemented with no idea when that's coming. We have a dedicated recruitment and retention unit called the health recruitment unit, the Department of Finance. It's great at recruiting nurses. Problem is they don't stick around. The retention is very poor.

So these are all issues that we know about. I know the Ministers are aware of it as well, but we really need to dig down and see how we can better support nurses and really come to the same conclusion that this is a problem and that we need to address it as a government. Because if it continues, it's going to continue to drag down the quality of care that Northerners have come to expect from their nurses, their doctors, their health centres. And this is mostly what I hear about, it's in Yellowknife where we have a nice hospital and a nice -- the Liwego'ati Building as well. We have a lot of resources here compared to the smaller communities. So the issues -- and these are issues in Yellowknife. So the issues that I hear from my colleagues from the smaller communities are nowhere near as -- or sorry, are beyond the pale of what, you know, folks are putting up with here in Yellowknife. And when you see and you hear stories of, you know, people who are otherwise -- preventable deaths happening in smaller communities, when you hear challenges of paramedics who, you know, don't have the regulations and the legislation to properly do their jobs as they join other jurisdictions. You know, there's a whole spectrum of healthcare workers. And although nurses are near and dear to all of our hearts, all the allied workers as well and healthcare workers, really need to be represented in this work that's being referred to the standing committee so no one is left out of their concerns because, you know, we hear from lab techs too.

They've been short staffed, running short for years. That just adds to more and more frustrations, more and more backlogs, and less quality of care. So, again, we need to be able to dig down as an Assembly into these problems. We need to be able to talk to the people on the ground. We need to be able to talk to people in management. We need to be able to talk to the people across the aisle so we can -- across the floor so we can come to a set of clear and meaningful recommendations that support nurses and healthcare workers of the Northwest Territories.

I was pleased to help inspire this motion and draft a lot of the language in it. It does show that this is an area of mutual concern from a whole lot of Members, and we need to work together to solve these challenges. Again, Northerners send us here to solve problems, and this is a problem that is in desperate need of solving. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. To the motion as amended. Member from Hay River North.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As this is a motion that is going to be directing standing committee to do work, it is essentially -- the committee could do this work without this motion so there's really not a purpose for Cabinet to vote on this. I don't want to begin meddling into the inner operations of standing committee. So Cabinet will be abstaining for those reasons. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Hay River North. To the motion as amended. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this case, I appreciate the Premier's statement because if you saw exactly what I see, it's weird. So it's weird that we're collaborative in that sense that -- so seeing the issue that he's pointed out, and I agree, it just seems weird. That's it, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to the motion, what I want to say is this: I wish there was more of a collaborative process. I'm not going to speak against the motion; it's very difficult to do that. I mean, there's everything in here I like. The only thing I didn't like is the process on how we were told this and, of course, the final process of instructing committee when committee could do this anyway, as I pointed out, committee's already on this, so it's just a bit unusual. However that said, I have been an advocate for the nursing and healthcare community since I came here, not to mention my previous years, so I mean I can't imagine me not supporting this in some way. As a matter of fact as I finish, Mr.

Speaker, maybe we should create a HEP, maybe a healthcare employment policy that changes the narrative for this because we have so many other problems we need to solve. That said, I'll be voting in favour. Cheers.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. To the motion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question has been called. All those in favour -- oh sorry, Member for -- oh sorry, Member from Yellowknife North, you may conclude the -- or do you wish to conclude debate?

**MS. MORGAN:** Mr. Speaker, I don't have anything more to add. I'll just ask for a recorded vote. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Member from Yellowknife North has asked for a recorded vote. For all those in favour, please stand.

#### RECORDED VOTE

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):** The Member for Yellowknife North. 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.

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

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):** The Member for Thebacha. The Member for Yellowknife South. The Member for Kam Lake. The Member for Hay River North. The Member for Hay River South. The Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. The Member for Nunakput.

**MR. SPEAKER:** In favour, 11. Opposed, zero. Abstentions, 7. The motion as amended has passed.

---Carried

Motions. Member from Yellowknife North.

MOTION 54-20(1):  
EXTENDED ADJOURNMENT OF THE  
HOUSE TO MAY 22, 2025,  
CARRIED AS AMENDED

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Hay River North, that notwithstanding Rule 2.1, when the House adjourns on Thursday,

March 13, 2025, it shall be adjourned until Thursday, May 22, 2025;

AND FURTHER, that any time prior to May 22, 2025, if the Speaker is satisfied, after consultation with the Executive Council 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 from Yellowknife North. To the motion. Question has -- oh sorry, Member from the Mackenzie Delta, sorry.

MOTION TO AMEND MOTION 54-20(1):  
EXTENDED ADJOURNMENT OF THE  
HOUSE TO MAY 22, 2025,  
CARRIED

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I MOVE, seconded by the Member of Hay River North to amend Motion 54-20(1), Extended Adjournment of the House to May 22nd, 2025, by changing all references of Thursday, May 22nd, 2025, to Wednesday, May 21st, 2025. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. To the motion -- or to the motion as amended. Yes, to the amended motion -- to the amendment, sorry.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question's been called. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion -- the amendment has passed.

---Carried

Now to the motion as amended.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

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

---Carried

Oh my God. I mean, all righty. Motions. No motions. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Acknowledgements. Member from Frame Lake.

## Acknowledgements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT 14-20(1):  
YVONNE QUICK, KING CHARLES III  
CORONATION MEDAL RECIPIENT

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge Frame Lake constituent Yvonne Quick, who received the King Charles III Coronation Medal. This medal, which was awarded in recognition of Ms. Quick's remarkable legacy and career in Canadian aviation and her dedication to northern tourism is a testament to her incredible dedication and support of the aviation and tourism industries in the Northwest Territories. I am honoured to acknowledge Ms. Quick, a true northern icon, for this achievement and thank her for her dedication to and love of the North. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

## Oral Questions

QUESTION 651-20(1):  
INVESTMENT IN PROMOTIONAL  
CAMPAIGN FOR CRITICAL MINERAL  
MINING

**MR. HAWKINS:** All right. Hopefully I'll have the whole question period to myself, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, during PDAC, the Minister of ITI announced the North of 60 mining incentive program, and I'm curious the -- or collaboration between the two territories, sorry. Can the Minister bring the House up to speed as to what success or groundwork in collaboration with Canada have we received. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this program was just recently announced -- the Member is right -- when we were at PDAC, and it's an investment from CanNor, \$460,000 between the three territories, to invest in essentially a promotional campaign to attract investment to the three territories specific to critical mineral mining. Thank you.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, is it targeting specifically critical minerals? Is it targeting a specific sector in the mining industry? And where should we see sort of some dynamic results and when should we see them? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, overall the initiative is focused on critical minerals and then from there, on mineral resource development and, really, investment attraction in the territory. But our focus is certainly these days on critical minerals given that's where the world is really turning its attention these days. This program is certainly just in its infancy and over our time, we will certainly continue to track, as we already do, exploration in it the territories, projects moving forward in the territories and, of course, GDP from our mineral projects. Thank you.

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

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When can the public see action of this actual policy or push out a rollout of what's actually happening, and if it is already out, where can we go to see it? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, this was a soft launch at PDAC where we were able to attract different ambassadors from different countries who have now their own critical mineral funds, their own raw materials funds. We were able to attract different investors, mining companies, exploration companies, and really we're able to start by rolling this out. We do have some collateral, and there will also be a web page that I'd be more than happy to share on social media to ensure that Northerners also have access to it as well. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 652-20(1):  
FUTURE OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN  
MOUNTED POLICE IN THE NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the outgoing Prime Minister has released a white paper on RCMP reform, its significant consequences for the Northwest Territories if these changes go through, which would see the force transition to a national intelligence and security force. I know the RCMP has concerns around this. We've heard some jurisdictions have concerns around this. Yesterday we talked about sunset funding for community safety officer programs, the need potentially for a new Police Act. Now it sounds like we need to have our own police force. So what is the Premier's approach to solve this challenge? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Mr. Premier.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the federal government, on March 10th, released a paper about the future of the RCMP or, at least, this existing administration's take on the future of the RCMP understanding there is a change of government happening tomorrow, so we'll see what happens. And that paper said that the federal government should be committed to working closely with the provinces to support a transition away from contract policing. Of course, here in the Northwest Territories we contract the RCMP to do our policing. But in that same paper, it said that Canada should also collaborate with territorial leaders and Indigenous partners to define a new policing model. So while the provinces -- this paper talks about transitioning the provinces away from contract policing with the RCMP, it recognizes that the territories are in a different position, and this is similar to the conversation I had with the Minister of public safety. Admittedly, it was a few public safety Ministers ago, but it was wasn't that long ago, where Minister Blair, who was public safety Minister at the time, acknowledged that there's a different relationship with the territories and that the federal government does have a responsibility for policing -- a shared responsibility for policing in the territory which is different from the provinces. So we will continue to work with the federal government on this.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that clarity. I did note that the territories are being treated differently. But this new model of policing, this -- one of the perhaps benefits is to start the discussion on how we can change community policing in the Northwest Territories, indigenize it, and certainly make it -- make the service even more representative of the communities it serves and, of course, perhaps deal with some of the historic inequities of communities that haven't had RCMP officers or things like that.

So in the discussions the Premier's had in the past about a new policing model, could he shed some light on what new options there could be because we've heard Members on the floor here have been advocating for police officers in their small rural and remote communities for 30 years. So is there a way we can use this opportunity to bring more policing resources into the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So our current agreement with the RCMP is for another seven years. So this is a long ways out. That being said, for a new model to be developed and, you know, fleshed out, it's

going to take some time. And so this white paper came out three days ago. I don't -- no one that I know was expecting it. I don't believe the RCMP were part of the development of it. And so there hasn't been a lot of discussions on this. And so I don't really have any insight into what the model could look like because those conversations haven't started. That being said, it is an opportunity to address some of the issues that have been ongoing issues in the territory in terms of, you know, the coverage of policing services and things like that. It will come with challenges, there's no doubt about that, but there's always an opportunity to improve something when we're starting fresh with it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Premier. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And certainly with the -- there are always new opportunities, and perhaps this is one of them. That being said, the RCMP is saying loud and clear that they feel they've been underresourced by parliament. Will the Premier join me in calling for more resources for the RCMP so we can keep our communities safe here in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we have a contract with the RCMP and that lays out the resourcing, and it's clear of the cost share breakdown. We pay 70 percent, the federal government pays 30 percent. We have advocated for more resources, and we were successful in that advocacy by receiving more funding through the First Nation and Inuit policing program which has closer to a 50/50 cost share, and so we have been successful in that regard. But that being said, we do have a contract, we do have a requirement to pay a certain amount, and so we can't get more resources from the federal government but it would mean that we would put in our portion of those resources. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Premier. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife North.

QUESTION 653-20(1):  
PRIMARY HEALTHCARE REFORM AND  
WORKFORCE PLANNING

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully we still have some healthcare workers that have hung on and are continuing to watch because I would like to ask some questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services around healthcare workforce planning.

So we know that there are almost 50 percent vacancy rates for local family physicians and

specialists in the territory, and the health authority has been saying that that might not be a problem because maybe we don't need that many doctors if patients are sometimes better off seeing another practitioner instead such as a nurse.

My question, first, when will we know exactly how many doctor positions we should be aiming for and how many of each kind of nurse positions we should be aiming for in each community region and across the NWT as a whole? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's always the aim of the NTHSSA to fill all funded position vacancies first with permanent staff living in the territory and, where that's not possible, to try to attempt to hire recurrent locums. The work of the primary care reform is to match primary care needs of the communities with access to the right providers to meet those needs. And as needs change, like aging population, chronic disease burdens, mental health conditions, practices change, expanded scope of providers, new technologies, the mix and number of people to deliver that care will shift. But right now it's too early to determine the future for family physicians given the changes in our primary care model. More funded positions for family physicians may be needed but it's also possible that they won't. While there's currently vacancies, we aren't turning any primary care physicians away. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we also know that as of June of last year, nurse vacancy rates ranged from 23 percent to 36 percent, depending on the type of nurse. And that's alarming enough, but if nurses are now expected to take on even more of a role in seeing patients, if there's a shortage of doctors, is the Minister confident that we currently even have enough nurse positions established, let alone the ability to fill them? So in other words, could the gap between the number of nurses we have and the number of nurses we need be even greater than those vacancy rates are showing? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned with the physicians, we aim to fill all funded nursing vacancies. But as we continue to refine the models of care and move forward with primary care reform, we'll be in a better position to ensure that staffing reflects the needs of the community. And as I mentioned in this House

many times, changing in the small communities, nursing has changed over many, many years. So whereas before when I started in my career 20 years ago, the nurses in all of the Beaufort Delta when I used to be able to be on the phone with them, talk with them in the emergency department, they had been in those communities, they were living in those communities, they were permanent living in those communities, and now what we're seeing is many people do not come and move to those communities. And that's why the effort of trying to promote and work with Indigenous people that are from those communities to go to school, to get trained, and go back to their communities. We have some great success stories in the Northwest Territories. But in the regional centres, you don't see -- the vacancies are not as high. In the capital, they're, you know, in the 8:30 to 5 clinics, those kinds of positions, they're not as high. It is a lot of work for shift workers, and some shift workers -- nurses come into the -- to nursing, and they leave within a couple of years because it's just not for them. Many people do that in many careers, and right now health care is hard work, it is busy, there is a lot. People are sicker, rooms are full, emergencies are full. So it is going to take a -- there is a lot of work to do with primary care and it's got to also -- you know, where we're trying to focus is in the small communities because that is where we see the biggest gaps. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the health authority tracking the number of expected retirements of doctors and nurses over the next three years in order to target its recruitment and workforce planning efforts appropriately? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, GNWT regularly tracks current and historical retirement rates as well as current retirement eligibility and retirement eligibility in the next five to ten years as it reflects in the GNWT public service annual report. The NTHSSA also tracks staffing levels throughout quarterly vacancy reviews. Managers are asked to identify any current or anticipated vacancies within a six-month timeframe to support proactive recruitment, minimize service disruptions, and facilitate smooth transition and handover periods. And I can attest to that because I used to do that. Part of this upcoming 2025-2028 people strategy scheduled for -- is scheduled for launch next fiscal year, and NTHSSA is exploring opportunities to strengthen succession planning and a support staff

development within the system. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 654-20(1):  
SUPPORTS FOR ADDICTIONS RECOVERY  
/ ILLICIT DRUGS IN SMALL COMMUNITIES

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to my Member's statement, you know, can you imagine that there are numerous people out there, like the young lady I was referring to, who wants help to overcome their addictions but the help from -- but they need the help from their own people within their own communities. Trust is a huge factor in -- when you're dealing with addiction recovery.

Will the Minister look at having her department look at supporting the residents of our smaller communities with financial resources to heal the residents of our smaller communities? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, exactly what the Member is talking about, this -- in the last couple years, the community wellness and recovery addictions funding is specifically to application-based from Indigenous governments or groups in the community that can apply for any type of programming that they want to offer in their community. And as it is right now today, in the Member's riding, the Gwich'in Tribal Council has received \$303,000 from that fund and the -- they've -- also the Tetlit Gwich'in Band has also received \$24,200 for that fund for this fiscal year. As well as there are funding for those youth that are struggling and possibly to -- you know, with our small communities, there's a high risk for suicide, so a suicide prevention fund within the community. GTC received \$72,500 towards the Gwich'in communities, and the Tetlit Gwich'in also gets \$71,533 directly into the Tetlit Gwich'in Council. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the response. I want to refer to addictions recovery and specifically to addictions recovery, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Minister take the lead and help heal our residents within our communities and meet personally with the interested community agencies who want to heal their communities? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you know, I'm more than willing to always go in and speak with the community members; however, when it comes to the area where if they want community-based programs that are -- those funds have been requested by the Indigenous governments to go through this process. So what we do as the GNWT, provide mental health supports. There is a counsellor position in Fort McPherson. There is addiction support that's provided through this program. There are -- you know, and if there's discussion between the Indigenous groups in that region and my office and my staff, I'm more than willing to have those conversations on how we can work together. 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. As our last Minister's visit did not go well in Fort McPherson due to a death, will the Minister commit to visiting Fort McPherson in April of 2025 to address some of the concerns of the residents? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** If the Member is asking me to do another constituency tour, yes, I will commit to doing that; however, the dates we can work -- our offices can work together with those dates. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 655-20(1):  
RCMP STAFFING AND POSITION  
LOCATIONS

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the Premier who also is the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Speaker, the last budget, we had a rollout, I believe, of nine policing officers under the Indigenous policing initiative. I'm curious as to what the actual rollout looks like, where they are -- where did they go to and where they didn't go to with respect to the nine that the territorial government was getting. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** So there were not nine positions rolled out in -- oh, I guess the Member was talking about last fiscal year, so that would have been 2023-2024. We're still in the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

So in the 2023-2024-fiscal year, the Member is correct, there were nine positions. Those were allocated to Aklavik, Dettah and N'dilo based in Yellowknife, Fort Good Hope, Fort McPherson, Fort Simpson, two to Fort Smith, one to the K'atlodeeche First Nation stationed in Hay River. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the kindness of that moment where the Premier could have made a bigger dealer than it was; I misread my note. That said, has the department applied for any more policing officers under that initiative? Thank you.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have that information on hand. What I will say is that we do have a significant number of RCMP officers. The RCMP budget has increased faster than really most other budgets in the government, and that's because we put a lot of emphasis on it. And so at some point we do have to, you know, stop the expansion and look at other priorities. That being said, there's always conversations going on. And when opportunities arise where we -- it looks like we can get a good deal from the federal government, we like to explore those and so there could be some of those talks happening, but I'm happy to get back to the Member. Thank you.

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

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one of the challenges I see as the downtown MLA, that we see a lot of -- we'll call it social problems. And, unfortunately, police officers are being used as social workers to deal with them. But the reality is they are being called on more and more and taken away from the primary job for general public safety and general duty stuff.

Mr. Speaker, would the Premier be willing to look at some type of way of increasing the police presence in the downtown of Yellowknife? I know he doesn't instruct the chief superintendent, but he does have sway with respect to influence of policing. Thank you.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And the way that the Minister of Justice influences policing in the Northwest Territories is through resourcing and through the policing priorities that are issued to the RCMP, and so it's probably a bit beyond my ability to increase the police presence in a particular community and a particular part of that community. And that being said, I've had conversations with the RCMP about Yellowknife and about downtown Yellowknife, and so I know they're well aware of

the situation. And when the RCMP wants to bring forward requests for new resources, there's a process through which they do that. And when they identify Yellowknife as the place where they want to see those resources, they will bring forward that request to us. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 656-20(1):  
CONSTRUCTION OF NEW HOUSING UNITS

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister of NWT Housing how many new homes will the NWT build over the remainder of this term of government? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Minister responsible for Housing NWT.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Mr. Speaker -- sorry, Mr. Speaker, I'm a little bit sleepy here. But I don't have those numbers on hand, but I can provide the Member with that information. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. No, and I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think by my -- I guess we can't ballpark things here.

When we're talking about new homes, can the Minister just define what NWT Housing means by "new home" so the public is aware of when we're talking about housing and creating doors and things like that for people to live in, it doesn't always have to be brand new; sometimes it can be a reno. So what does "new home" mean in the context of this conversation? Thank you.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I understand the question, what does a new home mean? A new home means a new build within Housing NWT and brought into a community as a new home. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. What does the Minister -- is the Minister aware of the current core need for homeowners in the Northwest Territories; what that statistic is. Thank you.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand core need is very high. We have over 900 families in the Northwest Territories that need homes. This is the waiting list across the North. We're doing a territorial

housing needs assessment, and this is important work because it offers us both a qualitative look and a quantitative look. Right now we've done the quantitative, and we're working towards qualitative. We're working with the university of British Columbia, and they have a HART tool, it's a housing assessment resource tool. And this tool is working with Housing NWT to go across and engage with communities with this tool, using this tool, to look at homes across the North, the quality of homes. Because we can continue to put quantity of homes but the quality inside that home is really important.

I've been into homes from Sachs Harbour to Fort Resolution, and I see the disparity especially with public housing. So when you talk quality of homes, this is important work that they're going to do, and we're hoping to have this done by fall of 2025. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 657-20(1):  
FUTURE OF MV MERV HARDIE

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to my Member's statement, can the Minister of Infrastructure say what the department's current plans are for the Merv Hardie Ferry. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Deh Cho. Minister of Infrastructure.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the department at this time, and MTS through the department, doesn't have specific plans to attempt to refurbish the Merv Hardie or to get it back up to speed. What investigations there has been has given a fairly high cost estimate to get it to be recertified pursuant to Transport Canada regulations. So at this point, more likely would be an attempt to sell the asset than it would be to refurbish it. Thank you.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Well, she just answered two of my other questions. So well, in the event of an emergency, Mr. Speaker, such as a fire or flooding in the Deh Cho, I guess it's not useable so my question would be could the Merv Hardie be used for evacuation or other critical needs, however the Minister can answer that? Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, no, I guess we can surmise this answer, based on the last, that the Merv Hardie isn't the path by which we would look to

support any communities that are being evacuated, if they're being evacuated in the region. Mr. Speaker, I will say that while it's not certified for use, we certainly are preparing for the ferry season with the other ferries in the region, ensuring that they are, you know, inspected and ready to go.

So what I can also say, Mr. Speaker -- one last comment -- was with respect to the Deh Cho Bridge. This is one of the reasons that we actually went ahead and replaced all of the cables that -- after the events that one of them had some damage on it was -- we are conscious certainly, at the Department of Infrastructure, about maintaining the transportation networks that we do have and wanting to make sure that they remain secure and safe. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 658-20(1):  
YELLOWKNIFE DRINKING WATER  
PIPELINE REPLACEMENT

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently, as the Minister of MACA will know, the city of Yellowknife has been challenged for the \$100 million waterline solution. I'm wondering -- and sorry, and I'm seeing that they've had to shift directions temporarily. What is the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs specifically doing to help the city of Yellowknife? Thank you.

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

**HON. VINCE McKAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Member is aware, we do provide some funding to communities. How they allocate the funding is up to mayor and council. At this time, I'm not aware of any correspondence between department of MACA and the city of Yellowknife for assistance with particular projects, so I would have to get more information from the department if there has been. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, water's very critical to day-to-day life so I won't go at length of that; I'm sure that stands as a fact on its own.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister's saying he's not aware of the problem or aware of what they're going to do, or maybe we can clarify what the Minister can do in his role as Minister of communities when the city of Yellowknife's



struggling with this potential financial endeavour. Thank you.

**HON. VINCE MCKAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to clarify for the Member, as I stated that the -- I'm not aware of the department and the city corresponding on this particular project. So if they have been, I will find out but I'm not aware of it. I'm not saying that they haven't been helping or there hasn't been any dialogue; I'm not aware of it.

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, you know, the city has planned to run this project. Unfortunately, like everything else, we're all aware that project costs have gone up and unexpectedly, obviously, the city wasn't prepared for that as are most infrastructure projects these days. So we're all running into these problems and community governments like the city of Yellowknife, through their governing structure, have had to -- have also had to be a little bit smart and diligent on how they're going to run this project. So, you know, this is not an easy task for them, and it's similar to all the communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a healthy, safe infrastructure is critical for any community. Mr. Speaker, the project went from several million to up to \$57 million and now a \$100 million, and, of course, they had to abandon the current plan basically because of construction and whatnot. Mr. Speaker, would the Minister take an active role, reach out to the city of Yellowknife, and see what resources MACA can use within their system to help advocate with the federal government to get more access to funding so we can get a healthy, safe waterline here in Yellowknife which serves half our territory. Thank you.

**HON. VINCE MCKAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. MACA does a lot of good work with a lot of municipalities throughout the North and including the city of Yellowknife and they're constantly communicating, so I'm sure if they are requiring assistance from MACA, that they've already communicated with the department. And that's probably something I could look into. But other than, MACA's role with the community government is supporting them when they have to make some of these tough decisions at times, not necessarily finding more money for them. I'm sure the city of Yellowknife has some amazing resources and staff to find funding and extra funding for

their community. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 659-20(1):  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES POWER  
CORPORATION DISTRIBUTION IN HAY  
RIVER

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to direct the question at the Minister of Finance who also works as the Minister in charge of the power corp because this is an interesting needle to thread.

So with the Town of Hay River finally taking over the power in that community from Naka Power, I'm curious on is there any extended debt on the NWT Power Corp, and does it affect sort of the bottom line, and how is that paid for? I'm trying to get that sense of what did the GNWT buy if we ended up stepping up. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Infrastructure -- power corp, responsible for Power Corp.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't -- the question changed a little as we went. There's not extended debt. The power corporation's purchase of the Hay River franchise, of course began back in 2014, was -- and was only just recently completed in terms of determining the value of the assets and the amount that might have to be paid under it. That process is also now a part of the GRA that is underway, and the costs of the assets and the amounts paid and what that may or may not do to any rates will be part of that process and will be reviewed by the public utilities board. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a problem when you have a Minister who straddles many files on a big file in this particular one. I appreciate the answer, though. Mr. Speaker, does the government have the money in cash to pay out Naka Power for whatever this transaction is, or what's the solution for that problem? Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Northwest Territories Power Corporation will be able to complete the sale and purchase of the assets and are not looking for any handout from the GNWT to complete that sale. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for NWT Power Corp. Final

supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to be clear, my last question which may be similar to the last one is, is it being paid out in cash in the context of debt, or is it being paid out in cash in context of cash reserves? Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, Mr. Speaker, it's -- I'd have to go back and double check just to ensure that I'm, firstly, understanding the nature of the financial question that the Member's asking, but I'd certainly be happy to go back and take a look at the arrangements that were being made. Again, this does date back to an agreement and an offer that was from 2014 and certainly happy to provide the Member with some further detail. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for NTPC. Oral questions. Mr. Clerk.

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Rule 7.26 and 7 where a Minister has made a commitment to provide additional information in response to oral questions, they must file it with the clerk.

I have received follow-up information for Oral Question 427-20(1), Supportive Living and Respite Care, asked on February 6th, 2025 by the Member for Frame Lake to the Minister of Health and Social Services. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Oral questions. Written questions. Member from Monfwi.

### Written Questions

#### WRITTEN QUESTION 15-20(1): TITLE TRANSFER ISSUES IN TLICHO REGION

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Masi, Mr. Speaker.

Title Transfer Issues in Tlicho Region  
My questions for the Minister of Justice are:

1. How many properties in the Northwest Territories are currently registered in the name of deceased individuals;
2. What specific legal steps are required to transfer ownership from a deceased titleholder to the rightful heirs under the current land title system;

3. How does the Department of Justice facilitate the identification of rightful heirs, and what actions must be taken to resolve any title issues including any specific declarations that must be made to the Land Titles Office; and,

4. For properties in the Tlicho region that have not been surveyed or registered with the Land Titles Office, what legal process exists for establishing ownership and what steps must a resident take to begin the land survey and title registration process under current Northwest Territories law.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Written questions. Member from Frame Lake.

#### WRITTEN QUESTION 16-20(1): ENVIRONMENTAL LIABILITIES

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Finance. Environmental legal obligations are governed by relevant federal and Northwest Territories Acts along with their associated regulations and guidelines. These legislative requirements form the foundation for the recognition of environmental liabilities by the government in line with public sector accounting board standards and the Financial Administration Act. The financial management board requires that all departments maintain an inventory of existing environmental liabilities and potential sites in the public accounts.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Finance please provide this inventory, including a detailed summary of recorded environmental liabilities for every budget since devolution provided in the form of project name and title, year, dollar expense; and,

2. For that same list of projects, indicate whether a land use permit or water license was issued, the project -- whether the project involved a GNWT lease and for each, indicate if a security was held and collected to cover the liability and the amount of that security.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Written questions.

Colleagues, in regards to the point of order raised by the Member of Hay River North against the Member of Yellowknife Centre, I've had the opportunity to review an unedited transcript.

The Member from Yellowknife Centre referred to Cabinet as working as a party. While it is not common for Cabinet Members to vote against a motion, it is their prerogative to vote how they want.

Further, Cabinet's solidarity is a key principle on both Westminster democracy and consensus government. Implying that Cabinet is acting as a party was out of order.

I've asked -- I will ask the Member from Yellowknife Centre to withdraw his comments. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** I'll withdraw.

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

Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's Address. Petitions. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills. Reports of Standing and Special Committees. Tabling of documents. Minister of Justice.

### Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 311-20(1):  
PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY FOR BILL 23:  
AN ACT TO AMEND THE CHILDREN'S LAW  
ACT

TABLED DOCUMENT 312-20(1):  
STATEMENT OF CONSISTENCY FOR BILL  
23: AN ACT TO AMEND THE CHILDREN'S  
LAW ACT

TABLED DOCUMENT 313-20(1):  
PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY FOR BILL 24:  
AN ACT TO AMEND THE FAMILY LAW ACT

TABLED DOCUMENT 314-20(1):  
STATEMENT OF CONSISTENCY FOR BILL  
24: AN ACT TO AMEND THE FAMILY LAW  
ACT

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following four documents: Plain Language Summary for Bill 23, An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act; Statement of Consistency for Bill 23, An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act; Plain Language Summary for Bill 24, An Act to Amend the Family Law Act; and, Statement of Consistency for Bill 24, An Act to Amend the Family Law Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Justice. Tabling of documents. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

TABLED DOCUMENT 315-20(1):  
WASTE REDUCTION AND RECOVERY  
PROGRAM 2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT

**HON. JAY MACDONALD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: Waste Reduction and Recovery Program 2023-2024 Annual Report. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Tabling of documents. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

TABLED DOCUMENT 316-20(1):  
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, SPORT, AND  
RECREATION FUND ANNUAL REPORT  
2023-2024

**HON. VINCE McKAY:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: Physical Activity, Sports, and Recreation Fund Annual Report 2023-2024. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Tabling of documents. Minister responsible for NTPC.

TABLED DOCUMENT 317-20(1):  
2025-26 CORPORATE PLAN NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES HYDRO CORPORATION AND  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES POWER  
CORPORATION

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: 2025-2026 Corporate Plan for the Northwest Territories Hydro Corporation and Northwest Territories Power Corporation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for NTPC. Tabling of documents. Member from Yellowknife North.

TABLED DOCUMENT 318-20(1):  
A DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION: PRIVATE  
MEMBER'S BILL: AN ACT TO AMEND THE  
PUBLIC SERVICE ACT

TABLED DOCUMENT 319-20(1):  
UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE  
RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES  
STATEMENT OF CONSISTENCY FOR AN  
ACT TO AMEND THE PUBLIC SERVICE ACT

TABLED DOCUMENT 320-20(1):  
EXPLANATION OF THE PROPOSAL FOR A  
PRIVATE MEMBER'S BILL: AN ACT TO  
AMEND THE PUBLIC SERVICE ACT

TABLED DOCUMENT 321-20(1):  
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON A  
PRIVATE MEMBER'S BILL PROPOSAL TO  
ADDRESS CONCERNS RAISED BY  
NURSES REGARDING THE PUBLIC  
SERVICE ACT – BY SHAUNA MORGAN,  
YELLOWKNIFE NORTH

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the following documents for the purposes of public discussion: First, A Draft for Discussion: Private Member's Bill: An Act to Amend the Public Service Act. Second, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Statement of Consistency for An Act to Amend the Public Service Act. Third, Explanation of the Proposal for a Private Member's Bill: An Act to Amend the Public Service Act. And, finally, Frequently Asked Questions on a Private Member's Bill Proposal to Address Concerns Raised by Nurses Regarding the Public Service Act - by MLA Shauna Morgan, Yellowknife North. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Tabling of documents.

TABLED DOCUMENT 322-20(1):  
SUMMARY OF MEMBERS' ABSENCES FOR  
THE PERIOD MAY 23, 2024 TO FEBRUARY  
4, 2025

Colleagues, pursuant to Section 5 of the Indemnities Allowance and Expenditures Regulations of the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, I wish to table the Summary of Members' Absences for the Period of time of May 23rd, 2024, to February 4th, 2025.

Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Notices of motion for first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Minister of Finance.

### First Reading of Bills

BILL 25:  
APPROPRIATION ACT, (OPERATIONS  
EXPENDITURES) 2025 2026

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to present to the House Bill 25, Appropriation Act, (Operations Expenditures) 2025-2026, 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 25 is deemed to have had its first reading and is ready for second reading. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. Minister of Justice.

### Second Reading of Bills

BILL 23:  
AN ACT TO AMEND THE CHILDREN'S LAW  
ACT,  
CARRIED

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Kam Lake, that Bill 23, An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act, be read for the second time.

This bill will bring the Northwest Territories Children's Law Act in line with changes to the federal Divorce Act that came into force in 2021. The bill will also allow for the collection, use, and disclosure of information for the purposes of the child support recalculation service and will make an amendment to provide greater flexibility for the judiciary to create broadly applicable rules of court. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Justice. 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? The motion is carried. Bill 23 has been read a second time and is referred to the standing committee of the Assembly for further consideration.

---Carried

Second reading of bills. Minister of Justice.

BILL 24:  
AN ACT TO AMEND THE FAMILY LAW ACT,  
CARRIED

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Kam Lake, that Bill 24, An Act to Amend the Family Law Act, be read for the second time.

The bill will bring the Northwest Territories Family Law Act in line with changes to the federal Divorce Act that came into force in 2021. The bill will also make an amendment to provide greater flexibility for the judiciary to create broadly applicable rules of court. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Justice. 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? The motion is carried. Bill 24 has been read a

second time and is referred to standing committee of the Assembly for further consideration.

---Carried

Second reading of bills. Minister of Finance.

BILL 25:  
APPROPRIATION ACT, (OPERATIONS  
EXPENDITURES) 2025-2026,  
CARRIED

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Nunakput, that Bill 25, Appropriation Act, (Operations Expenditures) 2025-2026, be read for the second time.

This bill authorizes the Government of the Northwest Territories to make appropriations for operations expenditures for the 2025-2026 fiscal year. It also sets out limits on amounts that may be borrowed by the Commissioner on behalf of the government. It includes information in respect of all existing borrowing and all projected borrowing for the fiscal year and authorizes the making of disbursements to pay the principal of amounts borrowed. 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? Any abstentions? Motion has carried. Bill 25 has been read a second time and is ready for third reading.

---Carried

Third reading of bills. Minister of Finance.

### Third Reading of Bills

BILL 25:  
APPROPRIATION ACT, (OPERATIONS  
EXPENDITURES) 2025-2026,  
CARRIED

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Nunakput, that Bill 25, Appropriation Act (Operations Expenditures) 2025-2026, be read for the third time. Mr. Speaker, I would request a recorded vote. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Finance. To the motion. Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I've said a couple times today that Northerners sent us here to solve problems. I know that we've heard in this House that progress is slow by design and that we often lack the resources to get things done. However, I reject this notion, this notion of learned helplessness, that only prevents us from taking decisive action to the needs that must be met. We are the architect of our own systems, policies, and political priorities. We can change them if needed to get the results Northerners are looking for. And my fundamental question, I think to everyone here, is why do we think, Mr. Speaker, we have time on our hands? One year has already gone by, and we will soon be facing the end of the term. And in that time, we'll have either survived or been consumed by a trade war, our streets will continue to become unsafe, houses will be built at a snail's pace, and our debt will continue to rise as our economy continues to decline. That's what's being -- that's what the trend is, and that's what we're going to get if we continue to move slow on the problems that we face as a territory.

We're in the midst of a deepening economic crisis. It started with the closure of the diamond mines and also only worsened with the trade war launched by Donald Trump and the downturn in global commodities prices that continue to limit the development of critical minerals in the Northwest Territories.

Our expenditures are unsustainable. Our public debt is astronomical. Our economy has become nearly completely dependent on public sector jobs that we will soon be unable to afford. This is the moment Northerners find themselves in. So the question is, does this budget meet the moment?

Mr. Speaker, public safety is fundamental, and Northerners I speak to are far too often concerned about increasing levels of violence in their communities brought by gangs and guns on their streets. Last year, we put in millions of new spending for policing resources, but we are still waiting on the suite of legislation that will create the tools for law enforcement to tackle these programs head on. Not to mention that in recent days, we have seen potential major changes to the RCMP, commitment to decrease funding for community safety officer programs. So our resources are being diminished, not increased.

Why are we still waiting for these pieces of legislation, Mr. Speaker? We moved a bill in five days. And I know there's public consultations and all that, but let the House do some consultations. We ran on public safety. We put it into our priorities. That should be enough to get the ball rolling and move expediently on this

stuff. Maybe it's an exemption to our normal process, but this moment calls for exceptional action, Mr. Speaker.

To quote the powerful statement of my friend for Mackenzie Delta from Hansard on March 11th that he spoke of today: At this time, I will not have any questions for this government because their solutions are few and far between to implement a solution to save our communities in combatting the drug crisis we are experiencing. The drug dealers are using our own residents to kill our own people just for a simple financial transaction. The only question to this House is what can we do today? And my question is, does this budget do enough?

More action is desperately needed to combat the drug trade, fight organized crime, and support our frontline police and paramedics, who are the true heroes engaged in an uphill battle against the worst social predators imaginable.

Turning to education, Mr. Speaker, the early learning and childcare system that we built in the Northwest Territories is not working. We've heard this loud and clear from childcare providers. They're still struggling financially. The system isn't working. And now we're locked into a five-year deal. The \$3.5 million we negotiated last year will be spent by mid-March. That's a good thing. But I think the expectation was that money would move faster. Day homes have not been brought into the wage grid, and there's no plan to do that, meaning our day home providers are continually treated as a two-tier system where they are unfairly penalized because they're a private business versus a centered-based care. This is something we're hearing from the associations, something we're hearing from the providers, and if we don't make changes this system will collapse. That's what we're being told. That's not my speculation, Mr. Speaker. Voluntary fees are an option. They're an option in other jurisdictions. We've brought it up multiple times. There doesn't seem to be willingness to take that on.

Mr. Speaker, we have been talking a lot about defence and sovereignty, for good reason. Our country's under threat, Mr. Speaker. I'll say again no one is going to undermine our sovereignty. Canada will never be the 51st State but it's going to be a hell of a lot easier for our adversaries to undermine that position if we don't invest in our security. Even though we can't handle that alone as a territorial government, we see the Yukon government and other Arctic organizations investing in think tanks, policy studies, and committees that are building the framework to bring more spending

dollars and defence spending into their jurisdictions. That's the kind of leadership we need. We need to have a very clear position that the NWT needs to be at the center of any sovereignty and defence plan that comes forward from the next Government of Canada and that we are the headquarters of these operations, that we have the most investment imaginable. That could bring homes, jobs, infrastructure spending, economic growth and, most importantly, safety and security from foreign adversaries. And I can't believe I'm saying that, Mr. Speaker. Usually we have to deal with much smaller problems in this House, but this is where we find ourselves in this moment.

Mr. Speaker, we still don't have clarity on the carbon tax, and we have a solution available right now. Bill 3 can repeal the carbon tax, move us over to the backstop so when Prime Minister-designate Carney scraps the carbon tax, or the leader of the opposition, if he is successful in his bid for Prime Minister, scraps the carbon tax, we are ready, and it goes away like that. The way we are currently moving, it will be another six, eight months, a year. Who knows? Northerners want this off the books. They're tired of paying a consumer carbon tax. Canadians are tired of paying a consumer carbon tax. We shouldn't be waiting. We should be moving. And we can amend that bill. We can preserve -- we've heard industry likes the rebates system that they use so let's keep that. That's what the committee heard. That's what the Minister's telling us. Let's keep that but get rid of the carbon tax now and be prepared for this change so we can move expediently, because now we're going to have to wait until May to make any changes. Regulations can change things but, again, Northerners want this off the books. They don't want the threat of it coming back, especially for a cash-strapped government.

Mr. Speaker, I've been advocating for the SPCA to receive more money. We know that the NGOs in the Northwest Territories do very important work. Unfortunately, that's not in this budget. I am hopeful, though, that the changes that the executive's putting in will afford them and other organizations the opportunity to access more funding. But I will be keeping an eye on it because we cannot continue to leave NGOs, who are doing this work, this critical work that is often overlooked, spaying and neutering pets, ground search and rescue, that are struggling financially to provide this important public service. So I hope to see that money move forward, and if it doesn't then we're going to have to have a conversation about that in the next budget.

There's no increases for the mineral incentive program. I know the Minister says that it's not the right the time, it doesn't lead to mines, but it's got a times eight economic multiplier. That's the government's own numbers that they're coming up with. And that's money that goes into our economy. That's local spending numbers. That's a great return on investment, and they're saying it doesn't make a difference. Well, if it doesn't make a difference, why is it still in the budget? Either increase this thing that has -- the only thing I could think of higher than that is perhaps energy -- clean energy programs or housing programs are the film credit which has a times nine multiplier. So when we're being told these facts and we don't see it on the paper, it starts to become confusing to me at least when we have a short-term way to create economic growth and invest in the minerals sector and send a clear signal that we're using our own limited resources because it's important to us, we should take that opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard a lot about the \$41 million that are coming into this budget. It's part of a greater \$150 million plan. I welcome that plan. But here's the thing: That plan's a previous commitment. It's something we secured in the last budget; it was just unfunded. And we have spent a lot of time, in fact 22 hours and 23 minutes, debating a budget, negotiating a budget, to get that money in place. And for me, when you say I have a plan, I'm going to give you the house; you want housing, I'll give you \$150 million plan. I expect to see \$150 million, not a notional plan that is unfunded. So this is a problem that we -- that the government created for itself by not funding that plan, just putting it on paper. We've now -- or they've now corrected that problem by costing it and funding it. So it is an achievement but it's still only, by my count, 213 new homes. And I could be wrong on that, and I hope I am.

Nunavut is on track to deliver a thousand homes by the end their term as part of their Nunavut 3000 plan. Now, they have other factors that go into it. They have different -- a different beneficiary structure and relationships with Indigenous organizations. But that being said, we could have those same relationships here. We could lean on them. But the relationships between NWT Housing and those groups have been fraught for years, which is why they went to Ottawa in the first place to get bilateral funding. But we have these -- a territorial housing forum. We have all these opportunities to find a way to collectively and collaboratively build housing in the North. I want to see those numbers go up. We have, again by my count -- and I hope I'm wrong -- 3,483 households in the NWT in core need. If you add

the retrofits that are planned, we get close to a thousand, just under a thousand I think, new homes and new retrofits for people, for Northerners, which is great, but that's still 2300 homes short. That's the scale of the problem we're doing. And home is fundamental. It's the foundation for everything else that comes.

I believe wholeheartedly in the housing first model, that you need to have a solid foundation of a home before you can address other problems in our life. We have the opportunity to help people heal, to help people grow, and we continue to invest -- it's like pulling teeth to get the government to commit to a promise they made last -- the last government for this money.

Mr. Speaker, turning to the health system -- oh and sorry, I should add our plan, which not every Member accepted but certainly we discussed, and there was enthusiasm from many MLAs, was 500 new homes -- sorry, half that. I think we can do 500. I think we should do 500.

Mr. Speaker, turning to health care, half -- as I said earlier today, half of every month Stanton Hospital is gridlocked. A hospital in gridlock, it refers to a situation where in-patient beds are full preventing patients in the emergency department from being moved to an in-patient unit leading to congestion and delays. This, in addition to one of the -- from what I'm told is the least productive operating rooms in Canada is only exacerbating the stress at the -- the stress and the problems that are going on at Stanton. 60 percent of doctors want to leave the Northwest Territories; nine already have and there's a 50 percent physician vacancy rate. So my question, Mr. Speaker, is where's the plan? Where's the urgency? As far as health spending goes, it hasn't diminished which is -- or significantly. But there's a plan to diminish it in the name of finding efficiencies and finding savings. And I'm sure we can, but until we address the core issues, we're not going to see changes.

The NWT Medical Association is trying. They've written to our Cabinet about the critical need for government intervention to prevent disruptions in primary care and emergency services. They've rolled out programs like MD Connect that brings people together to build community and do things that are wellness related. They host reconciliation and cultural safety events and funding for physicians to individually pursue coaching to deal with stress in their lives and issues that they need professional development on. The College and Association of Nurses of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, or CAN, is working on a pathway for foreign educated nurses to work in the NWT. After this House said it's not possible, they're

doing it on their own initiatives and it's moving forward, I think, by July of this year. So I applaud them for that work. So we see this progress going on elsewhere. We know there's a public administrator. But we haven't seen the plan. I haven't even spoken to the public administrator. I know people in my own personal life who have, and I haven't. And I know we're going to see that soon. But it's always been eventually, eventually, eventually, and this should be our top priority, to understand what's going on in our healthcare system and how it's going to change.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to another issue that was really a critical flash point in this review and in this sitting, and that's the closure of the CLCs. Now although Aurora College is an arm's length institution, I firmly believe that our government has the resources, the size to move quickly, and the political will to do a lot, whether it's using soft power to influence decisions or whether it's bringing these facilities within the mandate of the departments, there's always something that can be done. And if we don't do something, that's over 40 jobs that are going to be lost in small communities. And these are jobs that are not going to be -- those people are probably not going to stick around in most cases. They're instructors, there's nowhere for them to teach, they'll find other places. It's true the CLCs aren't working. Everyone will say that, including the instructors who work there. But the only way we're going to empower Northerners and achieve reconciliation and end systemic poverty is by investing in a strong education system that starts in the small communities.

We've heard directly from people working in that system and the CLCs, and I'll talk about the one case that I'm personally am aware of in N'dilo and Dettah, that trained over a hundred adult learners in 18 months.

Mr. Speaker, the ISEP program is the introduction to skilled trades essential. This is a new Aurora College program that was created and piloted in N'dilo, Fort Good Hope, and Hay River Reserve in the fall of 2023. Students from all three centres attended that fundamental program, and it was the first time it was the facility was full in many, many years. The program was so successful that the community wanted to run it again in the fall of 2024; however, the college wouldn't support the program so instead they partnered with Yellowknives Dene First Nation and used their instructors to cover the three trade components.

From these two intakes alone, many of the students are now apprentices; some at Diavik, some at Giant Mine, and a few in town. Mr.

Speaker, to quote the feedback we've gotten about this, they are cherry picking the stats to make learning centres look bad. When you hear that from, you know, the people who are operating these facilities, who are on the ground working with students, and putting their heart and soul into these programs and getting results, it becomes very hard to know what the reality is on the ground. Are these CLCs working? Are they not? But even if that's the case, what we should be doing is putting a pause on it. We put pause on -- we put many pauses on things in the past, to look at how we can save the ones that are actually doing their jobs and close the ones that are not productive. And I don't think this should be Aurora College's responsibility. They should have never -- I've never supported them operating CLCs. They should be focused on their mandate of becoming a polytechnic. They should be finding resources to support the students they've got and build on successful programs. But they should be honest and clear about the stats that they're coming out of these schools because, again, when we see one side of facts versus another set of facts, it's very hard to know what the reality is on the ground.

Mr. Speaker, as we know, this budget marks the end of affirmative action policies that put Northerners first. Mr. Speaker, I know that this -- the policy's not attached to this budget but this budget will be the inflexion point moving forward for the GNWT. Mr. Speaker, the P2s have been cut and as have priority status for differently-abled people, minority groups, who have contributed so much to our territory. And I know that an easy way to kind of denigrate this position that P2s are upset about this is it's all white people who are very privileged, but for many people, many Northerners, they're hard working groups of new Canadians, the Filipino community that has made a home here and contributes so much to our economy over time.

Mr. Speaker, what else is missing from this budget moving -- moving forward from that piece is a senseless -- sorry, the continued downloading of benefits, the cost of benefits down to the people who they're supposed to serve and I'm, of course, talking about extended health benefits. I did not support the changes in the last budget, and I continue to oppose them now. Again, they're not in here but the benefits are, and -- but they still cost far too much. And if we're adding to the cost of living of even a single constituent, I feel that is a dereliction of duty on my part because I promised to fight the cost of living, not to increase it. And this is a policy decision that has directly increased the cost of living for Northerners and their families and working people in the Northwest Territories. And I know



everyone -- we pay good wages in the North, but that doesn't mean people aren't living paycheque to paycheque. And if anyone thinks that's true, they're completely out of touch with the reality most families face, especially as we're looking to cost increases, cost increase at the grocery stores, for homes, for jobs, and potentially supply shortages as well.

Mr. Speaker, so I agree that this was a process, as the finance Minister said, a process that led, after 22 hours and 23 minutes, to this final vote in the chamber today. What we disagree is the nature of this process. This feels more -- this process feels more of one of convenience of a status quo that doesn't want to change rather than one of consensus where we move quickly to meet the moment that Northerners face themselves. And that's very important because when people look up, they're looking for this government for stability and seeing the same old, same old, but everyone getting along is -- we need to do more than that. We need to help people and meet people where they're at, and this budget just doesn't go far enough, so I will not be supporting it. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. To the motion. Member from Frame Lake? Or okay, no, Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Mr. Speaker, the Member from Frame Lake was before me so go right ahead.

**MR. SPEAKER:** To the motion. Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I chose to take a bit of a different approach to negotiating the budget this year. I've spoken a lot to the need for increased funding going towards housing in this territory, and we discussed that a fair bit during the vote on the capital budget, which I voted against because I didn't feel that we had gone far enough, and as I said at the time, my issue was with the word "notional." If we had removed the word "notional", they would have had my support. Well, the result of our negotiations at this budget where notional has been removed from the plan to fund housing in the Northwest Territories by \$150 million over the next three years.

Mr. Speaker, there are many issues in this territory that still matter to me. Many issues that I think we need to resolve. I'll speak to a few of them in a few minutes here. But I wanted to ensure that we focused on this first and foremost because it was my top priority, and by focusing on it and by really driving the point home to our colleagues that this is the top issue, this is the issue for me that I will defeat budget after budget over until we get movement

on it, by putting that laser focus, as was said by one of the Ministers said, I will say that the focus worked. Bwe have obtained a commitment from Cabinet to put a significant amount of money towards housing that we hadn't obtained previously. I see this as an achievement.

Mr. Speaker, a while back when we were negotiating the capital budget, it was identified by housing staff that year over year, the housing department is losing -- well, not losing, but there is an infrastructure deficit building in the territory and in order to address that deficit, we would need a minimum of \$50 million a year to address it, to not be losing homes and losing ground on any progress that we're making on new builds. We are putting new builds out there. There was new builds happening before we negotiated this amount, but all of those new builds would just be negated by the fact that we're losing more. And so based on this evidence that we got from the housing department, Members started to put forward the idea, well, let's not fall behind; let's address this. Let's put the \$50 million out there and let's make sure that we are not losing housing stock. That was very important to me. I really see it as a minimum that we had to achieve. But it's worth noting that we were not there. We were not putting that \$50 million into maintenance and improvement year over year in order to not fall behind. So that became a very important thing for me to advocate for, and I'm very glad to see that it's happening today.

Is it perfect, Mr. Speaker? No, it's not. Perfection is a difficult thing to strive for in governance. I dare might say it's impossible, but I do like to strive. But, you know, it's not perfect. I am somewhat concerned that we are -- currently the plan is to finance this money with some debt.

I spoke at length during my reply to the budget address that we need to focus on our priorities, and in implementing our priorities, we need to figure out what we can let go out in order to implement the priorities. And so we haven't fully done that, but I have some more things to say about that.

It's been suggested that we could do more. I don't disagree. But to do that -- we need to be very clear. In order to do that, we either need to take on a significant amount of debt or we're going to need bigger, more substantial, and more painful cuts. That's something I haven't seen a lot of enthusiasm for or specific ideas. And certainly I think there's definitely some areas that we could look at, and I continue to encourage and push Cabinet to make tough decisions, to squeeze every dollar, to look at our priorities and particularly look at the areas

that aren't priorities and how we can move money from those areas into the priority areas that we have because there are other priorities now that we've got money in housing that I want to turn to.

But, Mr. Speaker, I've been reflecting a lot on politics lately as I would imagine a lot of Canadians have been doing, as increased chaos takes place below our border and is now crossing the border in the form of tariffs and threats. And something that's really stood out to me is just how valuable stability can be in governance, just how value -- how much value reason has in governance, taking due care, making careful decisions. It is possible to bring out about radical, transformative change. You can break a lot of eggs doing that. I think that arguments can be made for both sides. I would argue that spending \$50 million on our infrastructure deficit in housing every year is a pretty significant change from what we were doing previously. It could be argued that it's an incremental change; it's not as big as what Nunavut is doing. But something that I would note is that as we've been studying housing, as we've been engaging with Indigenous governments about housing, as we've seen plans developed around housing, we've heard a lot of different things.

I was referring earlier in this session to the work that the Standing Committee on Social Development has been doing, and much of the advice that we're getting is how to get out of public housing, how to get out of people being dependent on the government for housing and how to create more agency in communities over their own housing plans, how to create economic development by getting people building their own homes. And that's what we've been hearing from IGs and so that looks a little bit different than just investing in public housing. I 100 percent support the \$50 million a year because I think it's absolutely necessary. There is a role for public housing in this territory, absolutely. But I do think we need to be a little bit careful about how much we want to double down on that role. We need to learn from the mistakes of the past, and we need to understand that a one-size-fits-all solution is not going to work. I think that's one of the key things that we've been hearing is that there is a housing spectrum, there's a lot of different ways to address this issue, and through a multifaceted approach is how we're going to get to our goal.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased with the progress that we made to bring more funding towards housing in this budget and the next two subsequent budgets. I think it's a big achievement. It's a big achievement for our Standing Committee on Accountability and

Oversight. I think it's a big achievement for the housing Minister, and it's a big achievement for our Cabinet, and it's a big achievement for consensus government, to be quite frank.

I will say a few things about what's next for me. Housing was my hill to die on as we talked about last year for this budget. Going forward, I don't plan to just sit on my laurels and all the good work is done, Mr. Speaker. I am still concerned about cuts that are being made to education. I don't think that we have a solid enough plan for workforce development and, in particular, the role that education needs to play in economic development in this territory. So that's where I'm going to be placing pressure next.

I want to be talking about some of the things that the Member for Range Lake raised today, stabilizing childcare. That is absolutely an important issue. I think it's something that we need to continue to pressure the Minister on and, most importantly, work with the Minister on and work with the childcare sector to find solutions that are going to work with the funding arrangements that have been made with the federal government with that money that's desperately needed to ensure that families can afford childcare, Mr. Speaker.

I too am interested in reforming primary care, had a lot to say during this session about how we can find -- how we can set better targets, more specific targets, and get clear about what we mean by reforming primary care and, in particular, what we are working towards.

Mr. Speaker, I care about economic development also. That's one of the reasons that I've been pressuring the Minister of ECE on changes to the waters regs and why I'm very excited about the work that the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment has been doing on reviewing the regulatory framework. That work is in the process of being concluded, and we'll be reporting back on that in the spring and I'm very excited about that because I think it can -- there's some recommendations coming from that that could really change the way the regulatory system operates and in particular how the GNWT relates to that system. And one of our priorities and one of the mandate items for this government is to improve regulatory, but I think that we have had a lot of difficulty around seeing exactly what we mean by improvement and so I'm hoping that that project helps put words and specifics to what we mean by that.

So that's all I have in my notes, Mr. Speaker. I think it's clear from this -- from this speech that I do support the budget. I'm very happy and thank my Cabinet colleagues for the

commitment that they've made on housing. I think it's a big achievement for this Assembly. And I really look forward to seeing the results of it. My understanding is that -- from talking to folks who are in the world of housing, that this kind of investment is going to make a big difference and people are going to feel it on the ground. That's the kind of thing that I see as an achievement of this kind of work, is when I see a constituent being put in a new home. So I'll leave my comments at that, Mr. Speaker. I am supportive of this budget. And thank you.

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

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm a big fan of brevity so I'll keep my comments brief. First and foremost, I want to thank the chair and deputy chair of AOC who have done an amazing job negotiating for this side of the House this time and every time, Mr. Speaker. I also want to thank the Minister of Finance for her hard work as well. I appreciate her making pragmatic choices in the spirit of consensus and collaboration. I also want to thank the staff of the Assembly and the public service who worked tirelessly to support this entire process.

Mr. Speaker, I will support this budget, and I will tell you why. It is a momentous task to balance fiscal responsibility and make strategic social investments into a core priority of this Assembly, which is housing. This budget is proof to me that our Cabinet is listening and doing what they can with the resources that they have. And even a bit beyond, Mr. Speaker, as they're willing to go into what I've been calling good debt for social investment which is something I explicitly requested in my reply to this budget.

We are remaining smart about our spending for the battles we cannot yet see, Mr. Speaker, but also tackling our priorities. We are spending on core social needs for the benefit of our residents which is something we talk about every single day in this House, and I am glad that we are making notable progress. While we have a lot further to go, the tortus may yet win. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** To the motion. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Excuse me, we're going to have to start replacing our water with red bull if we keep having these long days.

Mr. Speaker, as one of my colleagues have said, my colleague from Range Lake, we spent over 20 hours on -- 22, sorry, yes. So I'm going to touch on some of the negotiated items in my response today. I won't go through them all; I'm

going to leave that to the Minister as she's going to obviously articulate those when she speaks to the bill. But I want to talk a little more about the process, Mr. Speaker, and how we got here and why are we here, I guess, Mr. Speaker.

We're all elected officials and we'll hear the saying all the time, if you're an elected official you have to have thick skin, and maybe so. But, Mr. Speaker, we're also people. We're passionate residents from our communities, from our ridings, that get up every day and go to work, just like everyone else. It just so happens that our work, Mr. Speaker, is in politics. And to do that work, Mr. Speaker, you often carry a heavy load. You know, you're carrying the expectations and the issues from our constituents in our respective ridings, and we carry those on our shoulders when we come in here, and we take that serious. And it's often a heavy load, Mr. Speaker. And if you're from a smaller community, it often can be heavier. And I'm not -- that's not saying that the larger regions or the capital, Mr. Speaker, don't have important issues that they're carrying as well but, I mean, in the smaller communities you have issues where you have constituents who are regularly having to do medical travel. You have constituents that don't have access to government services like you do in the larger centres. You know, there's limited opportunities for employment in some of the smaller communities. And those things can be a heavy burden. And, you know, the Members from those ridings have to, you know, come into this House carrying that.

And, Mr. Speaker, you know as well while we're vast in size geographically, we are small in numbers and our ridings are typically small. And every Member here will know if you go to the grocery store to pick up a carton of milk on what typically would be a five or ten-minute task, Mr. Speaker, likely will take an hour, maybe two, when you have to go and do that because you're regularly -- I mean, you're -- typically, your constituent's your neighbour or your workers are your neighbours and they can reach out to come and see you on a regular basis, and that -- and that, you know, makes our job not that much more difficult but certainly we're always engaged with constituents which, again, is very important.

So, Mr. Speaker, we ought to be and, indeed, I feel some -- it's our job, and often we do, is that we help carry that load for -- you know, for our Members, for our colleagues, and we do that. It's something that I think we can improve on but certainly we do that. And when I look at -- in this budget, I look at the \$41 million, \$50 million, and \$50 million, so the overall \$150 million that are being -- that's being allocated for housing. I think that's a good example where we're all

willing to carry that load for each other. It's something you've heard in this House. We said it through Members' statements. Obviously, we've brought it up in the last budget when we talked about the notional plan. This has been a priority and likely the number priority of this House. It's something that we had focused on. And, you know, and I think to get to this point, it's not a small ask. I mean, it's a lot of money. It's not -- you know, it's likely we're going to have to take out some debt to do that, but that's good debt. That's capital infrastructure debt, and I think it's important that -- you know, that we note that. You know, this means that there's more affordable housing across the Northwest Territories. This means if you're a tradesperson, if you're -- you know, if you're looking for work, that's going to increase that work. There's an economic benefit to this, Mr. Speaker. And, you know, and that also means that homes that have sat vacant -- I've spoken to people who work for housing corp in my riding, and certainly in other ridings, you know, where you get -- sorry. Are you -- sorry, where you get -- sorry, I'll look over here.

We have vacant units there, Mr. Speaker, that are -- that have been vacant for years and not because they're not habitable but because we haven't had the M and I funding, the funding that we need the maintenance to get that work done. And when -- you know, when I have -- I have people reaching out to me from my region after reading the article saying there's going to be \$50 million put into housing, they're ecstatic. They're saying, jeez, I -- you know, give me a couple of million and I can get several people put into their homes. And -- you know, and that's, you know, important work, and it's an important effect. And it also affects not only people in trades or to provide employment through contractors and otherwise. You're looking at from sandwich shops to hardware stores to this kind of spending does have an economic impact in the region. So it's very, very important.

Mr. Speaker, consensus did get us here. I know we've had a lot of conversation around consensus. And I know, even those who feel the budget didn't go far enough, Mr. Speaker, and I know there are Members here that feel like, you know, this budget is not far enough, we could have done more, and I understand that and I respect that. But, Mr. Speaker, make no mistake, everyone at AOC makes significant contributions to the final budget we have in front of us today. Everyone had an opportunity to speak and, again, what we didn't get, you know, in our ridings, you're never going to get everything you want in your riding, or our budget would triple, I'm sure, to do that. But it was through consensus that we got here. I

mean, obviously, there were some very heated discussions and debate along the way. But, Mr. Speaker, we are AOC, and as much as it behooves us to follow our mandate to withhold Cabinet accountable, it also behooves us to support the work that Cabinet does. We chose them. They're our Cabinet. We elected them. We put them in there to be our leadership group. And we have to put some faith in what they do while holding them accountable, of course, is our mandate, but we do have to work -- and that's consensus, we have to work with them.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, no one in this House got everything they wanted for their riding. You know, for me, I mean, I'm going to continue to advocate for LNG. You've heard me say this in the House many, many times, we need a source of revenue. We have a source of revenue set in the ground up there, 19 trillion cubic feet of it. And we need -- we have a report that says it's feasible to do that, and we have to continue, and where I will continue to push for that and to push for our natural resources to get exported, to get that gas out of the ground to provide some royalties in here.

I'm going to continue to push for our childcare centres. I brought that up in the House. And, you know, we've got the \$3.5 million last year and, yes, it's slow to roll out. There is more work to be done here, and I'm going to take the Ministers and the Cabinet and her commitment to look to find a way to include day homes and to find a way that we can make sure that we have a sustainable daycare and childcare in our communities.

The community learning centres, we've had a lot of conversation around that. And again, I agree, we either are ones that are working, ones that need work. And I know that the Minister understands that is our mandate to provide, you know -- learning, adult basic education, adult learning, and I'm hopeful that when we're coming back in May, I'm excited to see in it the next sitting what that plan will be to ensure that there's continuity there and it's not just one and done and shut down, as the college has decided to do.

Arctic sovereignty, you've heard me in this House, and I'm still -- I'll still be advocating to the Premier to get our Arctic sovereignty council set up which the Yukon has done. They also have a security and university down there now. I forget the name of the course that they're offering down there, what they're doing, but, again, it's a council they're working on their security down there. And I'll continue to do that.

And I'll continue to advocate for working with Indigenous governments closer, whether it's

through housing as we've talked about here, whether it was through pooling funds, or whether it's working together on projects, again, a key piece of what we do.

But having said that, Mr. Speaker, I'm satisfied that the supplemental appropriations to come and the commitments on policy review and renewal that the Minister of Finance will outline when she speaks to this bill -- and I won't get into every detail. I'll let the Minister do that. And I think those are significant. And for those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I will be voting in favour of the budget today.

I'd like to thank my colleagues, a special thank you to the Member from Deh Cho, our deputy chair, who's been negotiating this budget with me on behalf of AOC with the Minister, her wisdom, I certainly appreciate that, her ability to relate to what it's like to live in a small community and ensure that small communities do matter and that their voices are heard at that able.

I appreciate that. I appreciate Cabinet. I appreciate the conversations I've had with Minister Kuptana around housing. And I appreciate obviously the Minister Wawzonek, the Minister of Finance for her -- someone already said, for her pragmatism, for being pragmatic, for sitting down for her wisdom and to -- you know, to work to get to where we are. And it wasn't easy. And I'm sure there's Members on Cabinet, Mr. Speaker, that didn't get everything they wanted for their department or their riding either, and, you know -- and that's -- and conversations I've had with Cabinet will say the same thing, you know, if everybody got everything they wanted, we'd triple our budget.

And finally, again, thank you to my colleagues at AOC. I appreciate that not everyone is happy with everything we got. But I do want to thank them for their voice, for the -- for allowing myself and the Member from the Deh Cho to go and negotiate this budget. Again, this is -- this is huge. The \$150 million we got I think is a huge win for this government. Not for this committee, but for this government and for the people of the Northwest Territories. We're going to see waitlists go down. We're going to see more people moving into homes, either new homes or renovated homes. That was key as the Member from Frame Lake has said. It was a big piece for us, and I'm super happy that we got there, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. To the motion. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I will be voting against the budget today when I cast my vote. It's not against the working relationship we built in this Assembly or against our hardworking civil servants. It is for my constituents. They need a budget that truly supports them and a government that listens. The people of Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh tell me -- people, every day, that the government is not working for them, and I agree. I cannot stand by while my communities lose their young people to addictions and mental illness and why elders are forced to leave their home community due to lack of local medical services or long-term care facilities.

I cannot stand by as my people struggle with the high cost of living. And I mentioned in this House, Mr. Speaker, that -- on numerous occasions on the 19th and 20th Assembly talking about the community of Lutselk'e in my riding about a winter road. And the high cost of living in that community is very high. And instead of looking for solution, it seems like we continue to put up barriers.

So Mr. Speaker, I struggle with the idea of the cost of groceries in the small communities. Everything's flown into the community of Lutselk'e, and it's very expensive. And jobs become harder to find. This government could do better, Mr. Speaker. The land is rich in resources, and the people are rich in culture, traditions, and traditional knowledge. But the poor living continues do not reflect the true wealth. Don't take my words for it, Mr. Speaker. Look at the government's own statistics. More homes are needed than ever before. More children are living in poverty and more food insecurities continues to rise. Homes are falling into disrepair as the public housing backlog grows. High school graduation rates for Dene students are well below the territorial average, and employment in the public service remains out of reach. These numbers will only grow worse if this government continues to do nothing.

Mr. Speaker, as this chronic underfunding isn't enough for my riding of Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh is now facing a funding cut while the territorial debt limit has increased by over a billion dollars. Where's this funding going, Mr. Speaker? Not to the Dene communities. We couldn't even keep up our own community learning centres open, and the department blamed enrolment rates, blaming the students. These centres have to be more widely used if their programs were more relevant and culturally appropriate for my communities. So all the money saved through the budget cuts and borrowed debt says in the GNWT headquarters because this government can't imagine making decisions without an ever-growing workforce to

commission studies and assessments without community input. We see this government knows best attitude every department. Mr. Speaker, that draft -- they draft their plans, ask questions later. Then they hire a consultant to tell them what went wrong. When I bring up the priorities, my chief and Metis presidents and elders, I'm told that civil servants, they never heard those concerns. That's because they don't truly consult Indigenous governments. Then I'm told that whatever priority they've ignored is not real priority but a political priority as if I'm asking for a handout for the Dene people.

This is the same old story, Mr. Speaker, despite promises of changes after the last election. The Premier, when he talked about his 50-year vision for the cooperation and thriving self-government, or the deputy Premier vision of the GNWT working with empowered and accountable regional authorities, focused on Indigenous reconciliation through the dialogues and relationship building. What about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People that were passed here? And it's a mandate for First Nations to self-determination, autonomy, and decision-making.

UNDRIP may have been passed in spirit but the implementation is still missing, and we see the consequences of that inaction in this budget, with lack of consultation and cooperation with Indigenous governments, closing the CLCs in Dene communities exposes all the false promises.

Mr. Speaker, we all want a dynamic, collaborative North where Metis and treaty rights are respected, but this budget is not known how we build the future. This budget kicks their can down the road to the next government, leaving the problems for the next Assembly to solve. Sadly, this not the fault that any one Minister or department, it is how our government operates. Our mandate for change conflicts with the GNWT mandate which seems designed to outlast any political leader's agenda. The stubborn refusal to accept change is a result of our territory not having a Constitution, which we need, to force the GNWT uphold the treaty and Metis rights and the international rights to self-determination.

But until a Constitution is in place, many of the changes my people are demanding for their families and communities will not happen. So today, Mr. Speaker, I am voting against this budget, disappointed that despite everyone's hard work in this chamber, we are not making progress for my people and for all Indigenous communities in the North. Some may say my colleagues and I are playing politics, but my

politics are about action. The only way to fight against the politics of inaction is by taking a hard look at our own territory and this government and the results we're getting. Without change, all the hard work means very little. Just the same old social problems week in, week in, and year after year since 1967, no action.

Mr. Speaker, I will keep working for my constituents no matter what. I will speak the truth every day as long as I have the privilege of being a Member of this Legislative Assembly for good people -- for the good people of the Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. I'm not attacking anyone. I'm attacking -- I am attacking the outcome that hurt my people.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, I put an invitation out to the infrastructure Minister to come to my four communities and meet with our Indigenous governments. Let's put on the table what their needs are: Dettah, we need a new school. N'dilo, we need a new band office, a new gymnasium. Lutselk'e, we need a winter road. Fort Resolution, we need a new water treatment plant. We need programming for our young people. Dust control in Lutselk'e is bad during the summer months. I hear that from our people every day when I go back to my communities. They text me; they phone me; I meet with the leadership. When I bring it here, sometimes I feel like I'm talking for nothing.

But I have the privilege of working with some really good colleagues around the table, even on Cabinet side. When I come across to say that these are things that I'm looking for my community, it's no disrespect to my colleagues or Cabinet. That's what I'm sent here to do, to speak for the people in my communities. Housing is one component. It only is going to fix up part of the problem that exists in our small communities.

We are in a housing crisis here in the Northwest Territories. I sat on the AFN housing committee for three years at the national level. And right now we're probably pushing over 200,000 homes short in Canada for all First Nations. Here in the North, we're probably about 10,000 homes short. But yet, you know, through the progress that we have here today, I can't even get the housing corporation -- or Housing NWT to fix one of my Members in Lutselk'e sewage tank because it's -- backs up 16, 17 buckets of 5-gallon pails of sewage for a single mother, a cancer member who's in remission and struggles. And I try to figure a way how we can try to address some of these issues, it's really tough.

The young people in my community, I mentioned before, I've been to so many

funerals, and it really hits home when it's our young people. So we got to do something about the addiction issues. We got to do something about the RCMP stepping up in our small communities to do their jobs. This government pays \$80 million to the RCMP. I bring it to the Cabinet. I bring it to the Premier. I bring it to the justice Minister. And I still get calls from leadership in my community. So we have big problems here in the Northwest Territories, and the small communities need to be heard. And it's my job to bring it here. But I'm also trying to figure out a way how we could work with Cabinet to look for solutions.

One example is that even though Housing NWT's got a \$199 million budget, that's just to pay for the operation of existing LHOs and public housing units. But I knew that there's a lot of homes in our community that need -- that home needs homeownership repairs. So I had to start thinking outside the box as a solution and put forward an idea to the finance Minister and to the Minister of housing. And it was a really good idea. And the idea is that we want to go into our four communities to inspect the homes.

In the early days, we had the HAP unit that was provided by housing -- NWT Housing Corporation funded through CMHC and Government of Canada. That ended in 1993. But since then, a lot of our homeownerships are reaching the lifecycle of 50 years and if we don't do something now, the NWT fire marshal could go into those homes in those communities and shut it down because it's no longer meeting code. So through the help of the Cabinet, we were able to get some money to do inspections. And I suggested that we work together and put forward a proposal to the Government of Canada to find money so that we could address those homeownership units' repairs because a lot of those homes are beyond economic repair and we have mold issues, etcetera. So those are the solutions that I'm talking about. We need to work together instead of putting up barriers so that it makes it harder for us to help our people. And I said this in committee as well, often that government policies are overriding our constitutional protected treaty rights because Government of Canada funds this government too as well for the Indigenous, Metis, and Inuits. That Mace talks about being the Crown.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say thank you to all my colleagues. I know we had a long session. And it's not often I see my friend over there, Member from Range Lake -- Frame Lake, the other day didn't say much because he was tired. A lot of people don't know this but all our colleagues here, they work really hard behind the scenes along with Cabinet.

Sometimes I come across being too hard, but at the end of the day is that I want to look for solutions, and I'm encouraging everybody to work together.

Some people say that you're almost like an elder, and I listen to the elders in my communities. I was -- been at a lot of meetings where the elders tell us what to say and -- but at the end of the day, we got to respect each other. So to me, Mr. Speaker, I'm just here for the people of my riding, speaking for them because the issues that we have are real. We got to look for solutions instead of putting up barriers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Colleagues, being respectful of the time and giving a bit of a break for our translators, we'll have a brief adjournment.

---SHORT RECESS

**MR. SPEAKER:** (Audio) me as Speaker under Rule 2.2(4), I hereby authorize the House to sit beyond the daily hours of adjournment to consider the business of the House.

Motions. Or to the motion. Member from the Sahtu.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too will be voting in favour of the budget. Recapping, before I continue, I would pay respect to all the previous presentations from my colleagues on this side of the House and the other side of the House. And when I look back at the very beginning of the Minister of Finance's announcement 13 months ago on Restoring Balance, that was the approach that we took, and knowing through experience there's going to be some hard decisions to be made. And the cost overruns have really got to be reflected to the hardships faced by the Sahtu region, particularly during last summer's events. But through collaboration, I was extremely pleased to see the Ministers coming forth with assistance of business relief by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of ITI. And the homes coming to our communities which really says it's a collaborative approach when I look at the community of Deline, and it's the same high cost of operating to my constituency budget, Mr. Chair. It's a fly-in region. I can only seasonally drive to these five communities that I represent. So one can understand sustainability and the challenges on a high cost of living in the Sahtu. But through collaboration with Cabinet, we ease that tension of high cost of living during the no barging season and the evacuation of Fort Good Hope last June. Easing the tension and the stress generated by families forced to leave their community, the Premier travelled to Norman Wells on our

request to help comfort the victims of the evacuation caused by the Fort Good Hope fire which came in within a kilometer of the nearest home. So you can feel the stressful tension that was going on during that evacuation. And we were saddened to hear during the evacuation that we lost a chopper pilot defending our community. And we're getting assistance from Cabinet and every Minister throughout the last 15 months but going back into our first Assembly budget, and we got two more to go. But it was accepted by myself, having gone through that, that Restoring Balance is going to be reductions. And analyzing and prioritizing the need for physical assistance is really a chore that I have to pay contribute to Cabinet in doing so.

However moving ahead, as said, I support this budget knowing the fact that reductions, sunsets, forced growth, is a decision made by the stakeholders of this Assembly. So in short, I respect my colleagues' opinions, and I look forward to being resilient and, in particular, implementing what we have. We have a budget, and we set aside a nominal amount that we can feel comfortable in saying this is going to be our surplus moving forward. Hopefully that is not jeopardized by the disasters the NWT has seen in various parts of the NWT over the last several years placing more forced growth decisions on disaster recovery. All said, we still have the avenue of federal engagements to ease that physical cost in operating our 33 communities. So in short, thank you, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the budget. Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. To the motion. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too will be supporting the budget. I'm happy with the housing funding that's going to be distributed within the Northwest Territories but there's still work to be done on distribution, especially within my region after I looked at where the preliminary distribution dollars were going, it didn't look very bright for the communities of my region. So there is room for improvement. So I am happy with the housing allocation. But there's room for improvement in other areas, especially with the -- my favorite, the income support program. You know, we have to work at finding a way where we can get our -- those recipients to be part of the economy. 15 percent of my residents in the Beaufort Delta are on income support so I'd like to find -- you know, get the Indigenous governments and other agencies involved in trying to get funding from ECE to create programs where they can build their self-esteem, where they can join the workforce, and be partners with the rest of the Northwest

Territories in building our economy, especially in the Mackenzie Delta where unemployment is high.

Closures of the community learning centres was a shock. I've stated in our meetings that -- committee meetings that this was ongoing since June of 2023 and then within a couple of weeks, they just dropped this on the whole NWT. We wouldn't need the adult learning centres if improvements to the kindergarten to grade 12 was put -- was made better rather than socially promoting our students and sending them to income support where they make a living off it. So kindergarten to grade 12 is where everything starts. We have to make improvements in our education system. It's pretty sad to see a graduate from a recent grade 12 program and see him at the front of the class having problems with simple arithmetic, and you expect these students to go virtually learning? It's a hard task to even comprehend.

The health care, you have to improve that within the smaller communities. About every week, I'm getting notifications from the regional health department saying that one of the medical -- one of the health centres are closed because due to staff shortage. They'd be open only for emergency cases.

And I'm getting calls about medical travel accommodations. We need collaboration with these -- with Cabinet, with the Minister, to bring clarity for the residents of the Northwest Territories when they're travelling; who's obligated to take these tasks on? We need clarity.

We got to find solutions for what I've been trying to bring forth the last few sessions is the crisis we're in with the drugs and alcohol. The biggest places where they're setting up shop is right in with Housing NWT's public housing units, and the local authorities or Housing NWT can't do nothing. It's sad when you see you go past a person's house, and you know there's criminal activity there. But I've tried, I went to the RCMP myself. I held interagency meetings. Our hands are just tied. We can't do nothing but, you know, hope and pray for the best of our people and, hopefully in the future, a budget will come out where everyone is happy. But that's impossible. You can't -- I can't get everything from this budget that I want, that the residents of my constituency want, but we can be optimistic and hopefully we can negotiate throughout the year and try get programs to heal our people to make them feel better about themselves, be part of the workforce, be well educated. Education is just a big factor; it's where everything starts. Then you get into alcohol and drugs and it



affects every department of this government. Every department, alcohol and drugs effects.

Collaboration and consultation with communities is a big one. This government has to consult with the residents of the Northwest Territories in seeing what they want, what's hurting them. There's a lot of people out there hurting. Even just walking -- walking home from after session, you see people are struggling. It's hard to see that. I don't know them, but I tell you I brought this up before. I was in their shoes for five months until my cousin Stanley, he rescued me. I would have been probably still there because I didn't feel like I was an alcoholic, but I was surviving. And I think that's what these people are doing. You just have to give them a little encouragement because they all have potential. They all have work ethics. But they just -- they're stuck in a rut right now.

But I will be supporting this budget. But, you know, there is room for improvement as the year goes on. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. To the motion. Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the commitment that the government will be spending \$50 million on housing during each of the next three years is significant. We have been working towards this since the beginning of this Assembly. This wasn't something that we just came up with a few weeks ago. And we've been engaged in advocacy for housing both through our committees as Regular Members and in individual meetings with the Minister, that I know many of us have had, trying to figure out a practical path forward on this. So we're starting to see the fruits of those labours, and I am encouraged.

I do believe we still have a lot of work to do, particularly around figuring out how we can better support people who are currently in public housing to move towards homeownership. That's a message I've heard strongly and repeatedly, especially from my colleagues representing small communities. I think a big piece of what we need there is to get going on large -- a large-scale amount of repairs and renovations in public housing to allow people to take over units and own them as their own. And I do expect that at least some of this new money will be supporting those efforts. But that will also take significantly ramping up our supply of tradespeople, any apprenticeships, and the building of workforce capacity to get those kinds of repairs done. So this is not simply a matter of dedicating a certain number of millions of dollars to big ticket items.

It's about putting the various pieces of our mandate priorities together, focusing our resources on programs that all lead towards the same goal, and I do think that one worthy and inspiring goal could be increasing rates of homeownership in the territory.

Now, the issue of community learning centres still sits in a difficult position. Aurora College's announcement (audio break). **\*INSERT**

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** (audio) this has been my first year working in -- doing the job that I'm doing. And going through a lot of -- seeing a lot of things change, seeing a lot of things happen and not happen, the drugs are in our communities, they're devastating lives of our people, health care. I'm happy that we have the -- we passed a motion to allow medical escorts. Now I don't know how that's going to work out, but when it does work out people will be happy about that. We had some little wins. And I reiterate what a lot of my colleagues said, there were things that happened, we got some things, some things we didn't get. But the way I look at it, we got some little wins and things happen slowly. We can't get things, everything we want right now. But all in all, I was sent here to work for the people in my riding. It's been a tough -- it's been a tough time for us. But we're working -- we're working together to make sure that our people get what they -- what they need. It's not easy. We've had a lot of -- a lot of death in our community -- our communities in the last while. So people are hurting. And here we're dealing with -- we're dealing with budgets and having to deal with even our own personal stuff, our own personal issues around our families and stuff and yet we're working to help our people.

In regards to housing, I'm happy what we got, the \$30 million for the next three years. Health care, like I mentioned, a motion to get medical escorts. However, we have the issues of drug and alcohol issues in our communities. But all in all, Mr. Speaker, we have to work together to find solutions for the things that we're dealing with. Even though things may look bleak to some, I say, Mr. Speaker, while my colleague sees a glimpse -- I see a glimpse of hope for our people working with this government, and my colleagues on the other side, the Cabinet, if you work with them, they will work with you. So with that, Mr. Speaker, I'm standing here to say I'm going to be supporting this budget. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Deh Cho. To the motion. Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to say thank you to all our colleagues here, both the Regular

MLAs and to the Cabinet, for the hard work that went into this budget. I know that we don't always get what we want, but I am pleased with the budget. I am pleased that there's more money put in the budget for housing. And we know that there's a lot of problems in the small communities, mental health, and drugs in small communities are on the rise, and there are efforts being made to address those issues. And similar to what my colleague from Mackenzie Delta said, there is room for improvement. But there is a good working relationship with the Cabinet and with the Regular MLAs and with the Indigenous government and organizations which I am pleased about.

I feel like the government is listening to us, you know. They're listening, and they're hearing our concern. With all the statements that we have been making since last year, since last -- well, last fiscal year and the beginning of the last fiscal year as well too, so they have been listening, they have been hearing our concerns for that reason that there's more money put into the housing, and which housing is a major issue in small communities so I am quite pleased about that.

There is something that I am worried and concerned about is that in Tlicho region that Tlicho communities are growing, and they are expanding. For example, Behchoko, they're building a new subdivision. That means that there's going to be a new -- more houses that's going to be going up and a new school will be built. So the thing that I see problem with here is that MACA, MACA funds, it's not going far enough. That one we need to -- that needs to -- they need to start focusing on working with small communities, especially the communities that are expanding, that are growing. More of our people are going home. You know, we're not living -- there's a lot of social issues in all the communities, even in the larger regional centres. Because of that, there's a lot of people that are saying they want to go home. And we have seen that happen in many of the small communities. So I am quite pleased with the budget right now, but it's just that the MACA needs to start focusing on working with the community government. And in Behchoko alone, that we will need more program and service delivery when the new expansion -- when we complete the new subdivision and with the infrastructure as well. So I am pleased. For that reason, for a lot of other reasons too, I will be supporting this budget as well. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. To the motion. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Start off with the good. A hundred thousand dollars going into the program for family violence shelter network, that money was saved or added, however you want to look at it, to help NGOs. I think that's probably the most significant movement in this particular budget that I saw. That said, without that money many people would be at risk, and I wouldn't even want to try to calculate how many people would be at super harm's way or worse, Mr. Speaker. So let's go with the other stuff, the less good.

Recently, as we all know, the government got a \$1.3 billion increase to the debt wall. And I think that that is really the turning point of where the housing conversation started whereas the -- I think it's -- I think if I have the number correct -- I mean, we keep throwing numbers around, but it's like \$41.6 million intended to be invested in it. And the challenge I see when I read this is -- when I say this isn't really going far enough is the fact that if you read the details, it talks about modernizing, it talks about proving, it talks about replacing. What are we doing for net increase? And so when everybody keeps saying well, we can't get what we want, I'm really curious what we got. We got the government's notional plan turned into an action plan to modernize, improve, and replace houses. I would have liked to have heard we're going to have a net increase of 50 houses, 100 houses, 200 houses. I'm sure you get the point - net increase.

So have we put those families at risk any -- sorry, have we made those families at risk any safer? Have we helped those people on the edge and have we protected them? Have we given them a firmer ground? I'm not sure this budget does that. I'm not reading that. I've looked it over, I've asked questions, I'm curious. I think my colleague from Range Lake even asked the housing Minister what's the net improvement today and she, respectfully, of course, took it, you know, as notice. Some of the stuff is still in the air; we don't know. Or at least she said she'd get back, I guess, to it. But the point is is that we don't even know what we're buying. But we know we're buying something. And that's kind of interesting. So we're buying a bit of time for daycares; I know we're buying that. We see a bit of money in for daycares. So, but it's not saving daycares. I think it's a temporary respite. It's not hearing their problems. It's deferring them, kicking them down the road. The question is is this budget -- was this budget prepared to take care of or support day homes? I don't know. But I can assure you they are even further down the road at risk, and this budget doesn't speak to that.

Mr. Speaker, political priorities, as highlighted by my colleague from Range Lake many times, you know, the shift, I mean, up until recently we were talking about 6 percent of the budget is dedicated to political priorities. Now we're closer to 7 and a half percent. I mean, so that's what we're really talking about, when we get elected to a mandate to do things, but we just surrender to the public service.

I wish there was two budgets, honestly. Not that I enjoy this process, trust me. This isn't a love it most days. But that said, it's not horrible either. But I would say, you know, I wish there was a budget where we talked about the basics, not -- basics nuts and bolts of government, and then we talked about the mandate -- political mandate of politicians whereas in this housing needs to be added, and we turn that into the political mandate from "indiscernible". But we don't. It's all meshed together. So when we say a status quo budget, we really mean whatever keeps the lights on.

So the irony of the -- and using round numbers, Mr. Speaker, of the \$50 million this year, \$50 million next year, that's the government's plan. And it's weird that when you think about it, it takes the Members to push the government on their plan. I mean, even to the -- even to housing corp's own, I would say, point a few meetings back, they can't even do a hundred houses, new houses, new doors, in four years. I don't know what's going to roll out. I mean, I look forward to it. But like I said, I wish the conversation was about net gain about where this money goes, not repairs, not replacements, you know, not refurbishing. And by no means would I stand here and say that that isn't important. Please don't get dissolutioned by my concern. But when we talk about trying to tackle that 3,000 or more in need, this is what we're talking about. We need net houses -- net homes, sorry. I should say -- I shouldn't say houses because houses come in many forms. Net homes.

Mr. Speaker, I'm still frustrated about the IEP. I think in time that was part of our concerns is the package. And it's the old you can ask for the moon as part of your process. And I'm worried that time will roll out that we're not further ahead on this file other than making people more angry with their government.

Extended health benefits, revisiting that was asked through this budget process, and it was unceremoniously dismissed.

Extending commissions or finding better ways to work with the brewery or cannabis industry, I mean, these industries are struggling, and they need every break. I mean, they are little micro economies that change the nature of a

community. As a matter of fact, it actually makes it an exciting community when you think about when they're busy and energetic and they're doing things, and people are involved. It's those things that spark life, and it's important. If the government viewed it as it was a little bit of a net loss, think of it this way: We do a lot of things for net loss. As a matter of fact, we have certain departments that should be called net losses. But that said, it's the benefit of what it does overall, that is.

CLCs, you know, it's -- I'm not tired of fighting this one, but I feel like it's one of these we keep ringing the bell and not enough people in the government are listening. You know, sure, literacy outreach may have sound like it might be okay but I don't know if it'll be okay in Yellowknife, Fort Smith, and Inuvik. Yeah, that's Yellowknife too. That's my riding. You know, this is this community. It's a risk. So the overall package of concerns are concerning.

You know, I feel like my colleagues, you know, whether it's my colleague from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh when he talks about feeling communities are under siege. And so when we lose the CLCs, but the college gets to keep the cash, I mean, it just seems so contradictory to the business of what we're doing. We have to do fiscal restraint, what is government talk about, you know, reductions but not really reductions. Well, I'm sorry. Every one of those communities one of these CLCs was in, I mean, that's a job loss, and every job loss has a ripple effect, and every community's going to feel that. So if you have one job, it could affect two or three people in that family and that community. One government job in a community is overwhelming. Add two or three jobs into a larger community. Add three or four jobs to a community -- a regional centre. All of a sudden you're affecting, Mr. Speaker, schools, kids playing pond hockey, you know, little social clubs of what they exist. Like, the elements and the fabrics are under siege. That's how I feel it. So when the Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh talks about feeling losing these things, I mean, I worry from my perspective for the community of Fort Resolution. I've been to that community centre many times. It's a beautiful place. It's a community centre, for goodness sakes. So now to leave them to sit there empty and heated and doing nothing, I mean, I worry. I'd rather we continue a process until we know what we're going to do. But trust is not a good policy to live by.

Mr. Speaker, if you think about what the Members actually accomplished cash wise, it's literally a hundred thousand dollars back to the family violence shelter. We argued and say held the line on the government's money. You know, it feels like, well, I got to convince them my idea

is their idea and, all of a sudden, they get all excited about it, and then I tell them, hey, great idea. Never heard that before. Well, this is one of these cases. I feel like we're championing their idea all along.

Mr. Speaker, if we think about the \$50 million, now I'm going to roll it up in a whole dollar, I mean, it's less than 2 percent of the budget. That's not a significant \*indiscernible. You know, so if I may respectfully say the Pilot Biscuit Brigade that lives on Glick over here and does it the old fashioned way of bean budgets and scraping by and then we look over, metaphorically, Mr. Speaker, at the well-taken care of side -- because apparently we've turned into a feelings Assembly, the well-taken care of other side. You know, and when you're asking for something about helping students and it's like, well, it's not our idea so against you, you know. So the idea is what did we support?

I'm glad some dial change is going to happen on the housing. I'm just personally embarrassed by thinking about, like, I don't think it's going to change anything. And everybody keeps saying, well, you can't get what you want. I'm just not convinced we know what we got, and I'm not convinced what we got was what we really wanted.

I think everyone here talk about wanting net increases to houses, not less squeaky doors or less leaky windows or things like that. We wanted new doors so families can move in and feel safe. I mean, I'm curious on how it's going to look like. Now, if you do the math backwards, Mr. Speaker, and, again, using round numbers, even though it's not \$50 million this year, I believe it's 41.6 or something in that range, math backwards is we're talking three -- if it was houses alone, it's three houses per community on average. But they haven't promised houses; they promised repairs. Modernizations and improvements. Not new houses. So I'm not sure what we're getting. I certainly look forward to whatever we get. I do believe that improved healthier lifestyle, whether now we're talking about suitability of houses, if it fixes families and our communities and -- I think that's a good thing. It's hard to say no, but it's just hard to say what did we actually buy.

And the last part I'll speak to, Mr. Speaker, is I frankly hate the phrase negotiation. I don't feel like we negotiate. I feel like what are you going to let us have. And I think people don't put that into perspective enough. So the media's going to go blah blah blah, they negotiated a good deal. I don't care what they're going to say obviously -- yeah, they can say whatever they want. We didn't negotiate. We got what they let us have. And that's it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. To the motion. Member from Yellowknife South.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's been a long day. I've got a lot of papers in front of me, but I'm going to try and get this on the rails.

Let me start by saying, Mr. Speaker, I do believe that this budget process is a negotiation. It is a difficult one. It's a difficult one for everyone. Not everybody on Cabinet gets what they want at the Cabinet table. But we do have to come together. We have discussions about what the issues are, what our priorities are, what our constituents need, what our residents need, from all different sized communities here, from small communities to the capital to regional centres. And it's not an easy conversation. But, Mr. Speaker, we always -- we always do come together and, Mr. Speaker, then we come to this process.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, one of the things -- and I want to speak a little bit to the process. It's not well understood. As I've attended FPT tables, federal provincial, territorial meeting tables elsewhere, I've realized how different we are from the way things operate in a provincial jurisdiction.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, I don't make the budget. The Department of Finance doesn't make the budget. That often is how it happens elsewhere. Instead the seven of us collaboratively make the budget. Everyone is responsible for bringing forward submissions from their department, we have to go around the table at the financial management board, and then it comes forward to the Assembly, first to committees in the confidential in-camera review process that we begin back -- way back in January. And through that process, MLAs have an opportunity to ask each Minister detailed questions, sometimes informing themselves about where they may want to ask questions later in public, and sometimes informing themselves to better understand a direction, and very often also pushing a Minister in a department on an issue they see in there that they want to see some change. Sometimes that ultimately comes forward through the negotiation process and sometimes it ultimately can be a discussion between that Member and that Minister that can be part of what goes on through on -- throughout the process of consensus government. People can begin to work together on issues as the Member from Yellowknife North and the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake now work together on a number of issues in the healthcare front. But then, Mr. Speaker, once we do come to a point where there is some sense of where we're coming into

the Legislative Assembly and conducting the public review of each department, of each division, of each area, the questions, again, get asked and, again, that's an opportunity where government is being pushed and saying, look, this is what the political actors elected to lead are asking and expecting of you. So, again, departments go and will shift the work that's happening within the departments. And so, Mr. Speaker, I do want to give a bit of a shout-out.

We do have a 2.6 -- a little over \$2.6 billion in total revenues, and our expenditures \$2.3 billion as well, \$472 million of that is the public service. Those are the folks that do all the things, every single thing that we're talking about here, that's them. That's what that pays for. It pays for them to do all of those things and provide those services.

Another \$1.2 billion goes out the door. It's the grants and contributions and transfers to we give to municipalities and small communities and large communities, NGOs. It goes out the door to all of them. And, again, helps us deliver all the programs and services we're describing here. And we do -- when we come to a point of trying to figure out what we -- what we need to do, from the Cabinet perspective we know walking in here it's going to be a discussion with Members from the other side in order to pass the budget. And there has certainly been evolution over the course of assemblies about how that gets done. And, Mr. Speaker, I'd say I'm proud to say that in this Assembly, we've continued that evolution leading to today where the focus is on changes that are reflective of the priorities of the Assembly, and they are focused on changes that not only prioritize the Assembly but also that prioritize the whole of the Assembly. So rather than being, you know, a one-off item where a particular choice for one community or one type of program or service that maybe services one group, it really is an effort, I would say, as a collective to try to benefit the whole of the territory and all of our priorities, Mr. Speaker. It's on a high level, and that's something that I think we should be all proud of, that we can all look at one another and try to find those kinds of issues where we can make big changes.

We also, Mr. Speaker, in this government have shifted to having our business plans as part of our main estimates, but what that's meant is that it opens up this negotiation. It's no longer just about line items, Mr. Speaker. We're now opening up the entirety of the business process of what we do as a government, what all of the public servants do, and opening it up to this discussion of change. And, Mr. Speaker, it's -- it is a complicated one. There's a -- I have a 14-page spreadsheet of all the different things we've been discussing over the last while,

areas where we might go back and forth and might find some room to change. I want to highlight just a few, but, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't -- it's just a few; it's not everything and I won't go through the whole thing owing in part to the time.

But this process of beginning in January, one on ones between Ministers and MLAs with particular issues or needs, going through the in-camera review by department, going through negotiations, it pushes the public service, who want to deliver good programs and services, and it pushes them to do that through this process. It's everything that's part of the consensus process. This is the highlight. This is what people pay attention to. But it's been three months of getting here. And even before that, it's been the relationships before that where we knew and we expected what was coming, particularly on an ask from housing, but on other areas too.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, there's been discussions around income assistance. And I know that's been mentioned again tonight. So I do want to acknowledge that. It's a known now need, there's going to be need to be some consideration of how we can re-examine and look at a success or lack of success of income assistance. It's not working the same for everyone and for every community, and that is a recognition. But that's been a significant conversation as a result of budget negotiations. I don't have the outcome today because it's complicated, and it's not easy, but the point is that it -- by being part of this process, the government is now being pushed to go and look at it because it's been brought forward. It's been discussed, and we know that there has to be action taken.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also acknowledge there's some small things, even just, for example, I think I -- I don't necessarily know which Member brings forward particular issues. Sometimes I guess. But, Mr. Speaker, there's been questions around the NWT child tax benefit, can we improve this, can we make this better for residents. Well, Mr. Speaker, I need to do some math on this one. I need to run that one a bit more. But we've committed to go and say, yes, we're going to look at this. So even ideas like that, it doesn't have to come through the budget process, but it also can. And that's, I think, what makes consensus different is that it, again, highlighted on today, but it is an ongoing dialogue and relationship that we have when we can discuss areas and concerns and ideas in a way that might not be happening when we're constrained in a different system.

I'm going to skip over my housing line for the moment, Mr. Speaker, because we're going to

come back to that one in a bit. But there's been a commitment, again, ECE and housing recognizing that they have an opportunity to find a way to increase apprentices. There's been a real recognition that this is an area of some success, but it's also an area where we just need to keep those successes growing and that momentum going. So acknowledging that.

Discussion around defence and sovereignty strategy and acknowledging that we'll have something ready for the next sitting. You know, again, that's -- saying that there's going to be a strategy ready in this area by the May sitting, that's a commitment that maybe I didn't need to detail here, but it's been already made to my colleagues, Mr. Speaker. They know it's coming, and they're going to hold us to it because they're pushing us on this as an area that we know is important.

So other items around discussing what's coming next in GRI which I know is important to some and how we're going to move forward with program evaluation. Even the hundred thousand dollars for family violence shelters being reinstated, reinstated, but also, Mr. Speaker, moving from health and social services, which makes it a bit more of a one-off, putting it other in EIA now, so reflecting again a push towards what can we try to do to make these systems, to make the funding to be more unified, more organized, and have them make more sense so NGOs know that funding mechanisms will sit in that, in a relatively more -- housed in EIA and over time move away from being department by department. It's much more difficult obviously for an NGO with limited capacity to have to figure out and navigate. So we're making that commitment to get that work done.

A lot of discussion obviously around the health and social services sector. And, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of work happening and a lot of conversations being had with how to make that system run more efficiently and effectively, not to -- in order to make sure that we're using those public dollars. It's almost a third of what we spend is on health. That is a major priority of this government. We want to be spending those dollars as best we can to service residents and to service them in a way that provides good health care and supports to the people that are providing that health care.

Mr. Speaker, it is sort of a last but not least, housing. I do want to speak to the housing item. It was a part of the discussions we had back in the fall when we passed the capital budget. And at that time, the commitment was to figure out a plan on what we then called a notional plan, and there was much -- much time spent on the word notional back then. A notional plan is just

that. It's the idea of presenting a plan with dollar figures associated but not necessarily knowing where those dollar figures might come from. Over the years, Housing NWT does on average had managed to find some funding. Typically it's from some federal entity or agency or the CMHC or otherwise. But, Mr. Speaker, coming in here, this session, there was no new funding coming, there were no new announcements coming, but we certainly knew that there would be pressure from our colleagues. So that notional plan was put into an incremental plan which followers of the House might recall hearing the Minister of housing have to say that she was describing the budget sitting as a witness incremental meant that there was options starting at \$5 million and gradually moving up of what we could do with different types of funding.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the full plan, the full \$50 million, so a base amount that was already coming from the GNWT, plus the new amount included to bring it to \$50 million is where we landed. So it is a significant investment, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest it was -- it's now funding the full plan. So it is no longer notional, nor incremental. It is now the full plan.

And, Mr. Speaker, I do -- I want to give full credit to our colleagues on the other side for this because it wasn't necessarily where we thought this would land, but it was very clear that it's where they wanted this to land. And I have a bit more sort of news, if I might, on that, and it's that, Mr. Speaker, although we shared with our colleagues what that first year might look like in terms of looking at modernization and improvements which is the major renovations that keeps a House from becoming a boarded up derelict unit, there's about 175 that can be funded through this and another 47 that can be replaced on top of that. It takes a huge dent over these three years into the \$200 million housing infrastructure deficit that we estimate exists, Mr. Speaker. And that's a significant change in that space to make sure that houses aren't being boarded up, aren't looking derelict, aren't bringing down communities, and they're actually going to be in and available for people to live in and to use and to move away from waitlists.

The other thing I want to give credit to my colleagues on is they've accepted, Mr. Speaker, every Member who is representing a community was shown the lists of waitlists, the lists of -- the age of the housing units and are accepting that this is now a data-driven plan. So, again, acknowledging and I appreciate that, you know, that is putting us into a place where we are as a group making evidence-based decisions and making evidence-based choices. And I do acknowledge that's hard because it



doesn't always align with sometimes what we feel when we look around in a community that you're in all the time, but you can come here and say we have an evidence-based approach.

And one other good piece of news I'll give, and, again, it's credit to our colleagues, by making this a three-year commitment, we now have more economies of scale that we can use to deliver this plan, and that means that these numbers, 175 this year and 47 this year for replacements, may go up because we are now able to order more, use a more economy of scale approach, and plan to have mobilization costs community by community managed differently or better. Now, of course, it's time of tariffs, so it's difficult to predict anything these days, Mr. Speaker, but one thing we can say is that over 90 percent of housing's contracts are delivered locally. They're delivered by northern businesses, northern residents, northern people. And, Mr. Speaker, so while I don't -- I don't know what's happening with the tariffs, and I can't necessarily predict what's happening south of the border. But I can say that this is an investment that we believe can be delivered by Northerners for Northerners. So, again, it's credit to our colleagues for pushing us for the three years because it's created that opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I want to -- I'm running longer than I expected. But Mr. Speaker, I want to quickly mention the CLCs, the community learning centres. Again, it's been a subject of much conversation. And I do want the public to know that our colleagues have been dogged on this, both on the floor but also with myself, with the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, right up to the very end on this one. I appreciate the grace that they're giving us on this one. And what I mean by that is we do need a bit of time. Obviously, Aurora College is an independent entity. It does operate at arm's length. We may not always be happy about the decisions it's making, but it is structured to make those decisions on its own. The GNWT does have a responsibility to deliver education, and the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment and supported by our colleagues is committing that we're going to go back and look and acknowledge that there's not one size fits all here, but that she will, over the next just couple of months, go back to the communities that have operating CLCs, go back to those that have operating programs, and figure out who wants to see what happened next. We've already had outreach from some communities saying they the facility. That will then look over to Department of Infrastructure to see what we can do to move those processes along. But others that want to see the programs continue, that may be funded from third party

sources. So we're going to figure that out. We're going to provide a critical path and the timeline, and we're going to do that by the May sitting, Mr. Speaker, which is a pretty quick turnaround, but it is an important item and we're happy to make that commitment.

So with all that, Mr. Speaker, of course, there's always more that people will want; that is the nature of government. The needs of the territory and the needs of the residents don't stop, needs of our communities don't stop, but this is probably the single biggest budgetary change that I'm certainly aware of ever being made, but we're proud of it; it's one that does reflect the priorities of the Assembly, and I thank my colleagues for getting us here. Thank you

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife South. To the motion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question has been called. Member for Yellowknife South has asked for a recorded vote. For all those in favour, please stand.

#### RECORDED VOTE

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):** The Member for Yellowknife South. The Member for Kam Lake. The Member for Hay River North. The Member for Hay River South. The Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. The Member for Nunakput. The Member for Deh Cho. The Member for Sahtu. 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.

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):** The Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh. The Member for Yellowknife Centre. The Member for Range Lake.

**MR. SPEAKER:** All those abstaining, please stand. 15 in favour, 3 opposed, zero abstentions. The motion is carried. Bill 25 has had third reading.

---Carried

Third reading of bills. Mr. Clerk, can you please determine whether the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, the Honourable Gerry Kisoun, is prepared to enter the chamber and ascend to the bills.

---SHORT RECESS

### Assent to Bills

**THE COMMISSIONER OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES (Gerald W. Kisoun):** Please be seated. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, Premier Simpson, Ministers, Members of the Legislative Assembly, and staff, and visitors in the public gallery. [Translation] INSERT\* [Translation Ends] welcome. I wish to acknowledge that the land on which we gather are treaty lands and the home to many Indigenous people, including the Akaitcho Dene, the Tlicho, the Metis. We are grateful to be on this land. I want to thank my family and my friends and community for their support. I hope that I make you proud.

Now as the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, I am pleased to assent to the following bills:

- Bill 11: An Act to Amend the Motor Vehicles Act;
- Bill 12: Business Day Statute Law Amendment Act;  
Bill 19: Supplementary Appropriation Act (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 3, 2024-2025;
- Bill 20: Supplementary Appropriation Act (Operations Expenditures and Borrowing Authorization), No. 2, 2024-2025;
- Bill 25: Appropriation Act (Operations Expenditures), 2025-2026.

[Translation] INSERT\* [Translation Ends] Merci beaucoup. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

**MR. SPEAKER:** Please be seated. Colleagues, it's now my turn to talk. I listened to 12 replies to the budget, so I got my binder ready to go. So we got until about 10 o'clock so.

I'd like to thank the Commissioner, the Honourable Gerald Kisoun, for being here today to assent to our legislation. It was an honour having him join us in this chamber. Thank you, Mr. Commissioner.

Colleagues, before we adjourn, I want to say a few words. I'll be quick, because I know we all have things to do, people to see, and many of us are preparing to travel home to our constituents, friends and family.

Colleagues, please join me in thanking everyone that makes it possible to do our jobs here. We have and we rely on a wonderful team, and I want to let them know we appreciate all they do for us.

Our staff do everything from keeping the building open and operating safely, to ensuring we are seen and heard on television, computers, and radios across the territory, to providing research and procedural advice.

Our contractors ensure the Assembly building is clean, snow is cleared, and the meals are delicious and nutritious. Please join me in thanking them.

I also want to say a special thank you to our interpreters and our pages. February was Indigenous Languages Month, and it was wonderful to see our interpreters and hear our Indigenous languages spoken each day.

We honour our cultures when we use our languages, and our interpreters make it possible for us to do that. Please join me in thanking our interpreters for their hard work and dedication to our language as well as the beautiful potluck we had at lunchtime, and it was all traditional food.

Colleagues, I love that we are able to bring youth from across the territory to join us in this House as pages. The youth are our future, and I believe our page program invests in that future by teaching our youth about our form of consensus government. It is amazing to watch their confidence grow throughout their time here, and I want to let them know that they do a great job and we appreciate their efforts.

These young people are our future leaders, our future teachers, doctors and tradespeople. No matter what path they take, I know they will be working for a better future.

I know some of our pages really love the time they spend here. In fact, some of them love it so much they come back to us. Two of our current table officers are former pages, so maybe we'll see some of you again the future. I didn't say the people's names, I'd just like to thank them.

Colleagues, please join me in thanking all of our pages for being here with us this whole sitting, so.

I also want to take a moment to talk about another great program we offer for our young people – our youth parliament program. From April 29<sup>th</sup> to May 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, we will host 19 grade nine and ten students from across the territory to learn about our style of consensus government and participate in a model session in this chamber.

Colleagues, I cannot stress how much I enjoy our youth parliament program. It is both inspiring and humbling to work with and hear our youth when they speak to the issues



impacting them, their peers, and their communities. I plan on being here to participate in the program again this year, and I want to encourage each of you to do the same. If possible, take the time to meet with your youth representatives. Also, our team will be looking for Members to volunteer as pages during the model session. Please consider giving a few hours of your time to serve our youth parliamentarians. It's a great experience for both Members and the youth.

Finally, colleagues, I want to congratulate you on getting through what I believe is our most challenging sitting of the year – maybe not -- when we consider our main estimates and operations budget. I've sat as both a Regular Member and Cabinet Member and now as a Speaker. I know these discussions and negotiations can pull at our heartstrings. We want to do what we think is best for our residents and our territory, but we do not always agree. It takes a lot of work, communication and compromise to get through a budget. We make difficult decisions, work together, and we move forward together. This is consensus government in action. I know personally you don't always get what you're looking for, but that is part of the process.

Colleagues, this House is not scheduled to sit again until May, but I know we will all be busy with the ongoing work of government and committees. I look forward to seeing all of you back in this chamber in May for our next sitting.

Thank you, colleagues. Let's wrap this up so we can get home to our friends and family. Don't forget to let them know how much their support and encouragement matters to you.

Mr. Clerk, orders of the day.

### Orders of the Day

#### CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Wednesday, May 21st, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer or Reflection
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
  - Oral Question 530-20(1), Senior Envoy to Government of Canada
  - Oral Question 607-20(1), Coverage Exemptions for Uninsured Medical Procedures

- Oral Question 645-20(1), Senior Envoy to the Government of Canada
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
  6. Acknowledgements
  7. Oral Questions
  8. Written Questions
  9. Returns to Written Questions
    - Written Question 14-20(1), Operating Rooms at Stanton Territorial Hospital
    - Written Question 15-20(1), Title Transfer Issues in Tlicho Region
    - Written Question 16-20(1), Environmental Issues
  10. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
  11. Petitions
  12. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
  13. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
  14. Tabling of Documents
  15. Notices of Motions
  16. Motions
  17. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
  18. First Reading of Bills
  19. Second Reading of Bills
  20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
  21. Report of Committee of the Whole
  22. Third Reading of Bills
  23. Orders of the Day

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

This House stands adjourned until Wednesday, May 21st, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

