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The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Thursday, March 6, 2025****Members Present**

Hon. Caitlin Cleveland, Mr. Edjericon, Mr. Hawkins, Hon. Lucy Kuptana, Hon. Jay Macdonald, Hon. Vince McKay, Mr. McNeely, Ms. Morgan, Mr. Morse, 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 1:31 p.m.

Prayer or Reflection

---Prayer or Reflection

SPEAKER (HON. SHANE THOMPSON):

Please be seated. I'd like to thank elder Joe Otokiak for the opening prayer.

Colleagues, before we get going any further, it's been brought to my attention somebody very special is having a birthday today, one of our translators Judy *Esamiuk -- I said her name wrong again, I apologize. But we'd like to wish her a very Happy Birthday. I think it's her 29th.

Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Status of Women.

Ministers' Statements

**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 112-20(1):
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge International Women's Day, which is observed annually on March 8th to celebrate women's social, cultural, and political achievements throughout history and across nations. International Women's Day provides an important opportunity to showcase commitments towards women's equality, raise awareness about issues affecting women, and to highlight initiatives towards gender parity.

The theme of this year's International Women's Day is Accelerate Action. According to the World Economic Forum, at the current rate of progress full gender parity will not be achieved until 2158; roughly five generations from now. As the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, I am committed to closing this gap much sooner and ensuring meaningful progress across our territory.

This year's theme underscores the need for swift, decisive steps to advance gender equality. It calls for a greater momentum and urgency in dismantling systemic barriers and biases that continue to hold women back.

Mr. Speaker, despite decades of effort, gender inequality remains deeply entrenched. Progress in areas such as economic participation, political representation, and the fight against gender-based violence has been slow. Accelerating Action means moving beyond ineffective approaches and embracing bold, transformative solutions that drive real change.

Our young women and girls have great potential to be our future leaders. To support them, we must ensure they have resources and opportunities to reach their full potential. Investing in education, affordable housing, health care, employment, and childcare, does not just empower women; it strengthens our economy and benefits society as a whole.

In recent years, events like the COVID pandemic and the wildfire evacuation, disproportionately affected women particularly in terms of job loss, homelessness, increased unpaid caregiving burdens, and heightened domestic violence. Accelerate Action signals that urgent and coordinated approaches are necessary to recover lost ground and ensure women are not left behind when events like these happen.

Mr. Speaker, I thank all women across the territory for their invaluable contributions to our communities, our families, and our workplaces; both today and throughout the year. We recognize that women face multiple barriers and gender-based discrimination. These obstacles make it difficult for women to attain equal footing. We must continue to work together to develop and implement strategies to prevent violence against women and girls, promote the development of women in leadership positions, and continue to ensure women and girls are safe in the Northwest Territories. Quyananni, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for the Status of Women. Ministers' statements. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 113-20(1):
IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS
LEGISLATION**

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Merci, Monsieur le President. [Translation] Translatin will be inserted for final Hansard -eds. [Translation ends]. Merci, Monsieur le President.

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

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 573-20(1): ARCTIC SOVEREIGNTY

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, the spotlight is on the North as the circumpolar world takes stage in the geopolitical arena. Manmade climate change is causing Arctic ice to melt rapidly each year opening up shipping routes merchants died trying to forge ages ago and unlocking resources which were once unreachable. Now, rival powers like China and Russia are militarising the region as their posturing becomes even more hostile. As our Arctic seas continue to melt, the open waters beckon them to escalate their challenges to our sovereignty in an effort to establish an even greater foothold in the region.

If those converging factors couldn't get any worse, now Donald Trump has discarded our cooperative relationship and thrown our ability to coordinate our defense of the region into doubt. The United States has long argued already that our sovereign territory in the Arctic is an international waterway, so it's only a matter of time seemingly until the American President decides to cave into Russian pressure and try to secure them a bigger role in the Arctic just as they are doing in Ukraine. With the United States retreating from the free world and western nations are now rearming to face threats alone, it's time for us to do the same.

For too long we have neglected our armed forces and defense infrastructure; however, if the chaos in the global stage caused by the United States has a silver lining it's that we may be finally be developing the political will to take corrective action. Today I was encouraged to learn the federal government is expanding its presence in the Arctic by investing well over \$2 billion to establish three new defense hubs across the Arctic. While we could have used these investments years ago, these efforts are better late than never. The time has come to protect Canadian strength in the Arctic and make it clear to the rest of the world our sovereignty is not up for grabs.

Next week Canada will have a new Prime Minister, and I hope to see our Premier make clear to him that one of his first priorities in

Canada is protecting the North, securing our sovereignty, and keeping the True North strong and free. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 574-20(1): INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2025

MS. REID: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to rise and recognize that this upcoming Saturday, March 8th, is International Women's Day. It is an honour to be the Commonwealth woman parliamentarian for the Northwest Territories, and I'm pleased to note the importance of this day in the legislature.

There's no right way to be a woman. I mark this day by reaffirming my commitment to fight for the safety and equity of all women, girls, and gender-diverse folks. I mark this day by saying that we, and every single Canadian, has so much farther to go in responding to the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. I mark this day with mixed emotions. I have pride in our northern leadership that across the territory is full of strong leaders who are women and gender-diverse. I have pride that northern communities are full of women and gender-diverse folks helping each other flourish every day. But I'm also full of rage that violence perpetuated against women and gender-diverse folks in this territory and country is on the rise. I am annoyed and frustrated that issues that are often thought of as women's issues, such as childcare, are under-resourced.

Words have meaning, Mr. Speaker, but actions speak louder than words. Let all of us in this House recommit to what positive and lasting action looks like for northern women, girls, and gender-diverse folks across our territory and to support that action with sustainable funding and capacity for the organizations on the front lines. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 575-20(1): INCOME ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to echo what my colleague from the Mackenzie Delta said yesterday about the income assistance program. Bmany people in Tlicho region receive income assistance. Almost one quarter of residents in Behchoko rely on it. That's more than 400 people.

Mr. Speaker, we must ask if the government is supporting the people the right way. I know constituents with permanent disabilities who lost income support last year because a family member briefly worked part-time. Income assistance is intended to provide financial assistance to residents to help meet their basic needs so that they are able to participate fully in community life and take part in the opportunities available to them.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot expect to build up our workforce if families who rely on assistance lose that financial security when they work part-time to make ends meet.

Income exemptions under the new regulations will help. The Minister of Education, Culture and Employment said her department provided an additional \$5 million last year and launched a new income assistance program for seniors and people with disabilities in July. The department removed requirements to seek and maintain employment. But will this help our youth hoping to retrain and work?

Mr. Speaker, Tlicho people are very hardworking. When we rely totally on the land, we did not wait for the caribou to come to us. I want to motivate our young people to find work. I will have question for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 576-20(1):
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF
IMPERIAL OIL OPERATIONS IN NORMAN
WELLS

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Norman Wells Esso oil field is a unique discovery with a low-cost blend. Refining costs are minimal. Mr. Speaker, this unique discovery has operated within our territory for over a century. To release the potential, the operator and the federal owners released a development expansion in the early 1980s.

Mr. Speaker, the asset, as the operator in industry refers to, has recently moved into two sections being called for an EA or, Mr. Speaker, environmental assessment; one being the oil field operating authority and the second a connection been the gathering system referred to as line 490 replacement.

Mr. Speaker, this regulatory EA process allows for IRs, or information requests, providing responses to deadlines can become

challenging for proponents. Mr. Speaker, as an ex-driller during the '80s expansion and now an advocate for responsible development, and somewhat knowledgeable on our modern NWT regulatory systems since the days of development, it's concerning to me and others to see on the registry 350 IRs due by this Monday. Later, Mr. Speaker, I will have questions to the Minister of ECC. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Members' statements. Member from Inuvik Twin Lakes.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 577-20(1):
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2025

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, March 8th, will be International Women's Day, and I stand before you as an Indigenous woman - a mother, a daughter, a granddaughter, a wife, now as a Member of this Legislative Assembly and, most importantly, a grandmother. I am deeply grateful for those remarkable women who broke the trail before me and many women in this House, those who faced countless challenges and paved the way for our future generations. Their strength and resilience inspire me every day.

This year's theme, Accelerate Action, resonates profoundly with us in the Northwest Territories. While we have made significant strides towards gender equality, we must remain vigilant and hold onto our achievements and push forward. The world is changing rapidly, and we have responsibilities to ensure that women and girls in our communities continue to thrive.

In the Northwest Territories, we face unique challenges. It's imperative that we work together to address these issues. Education, cultural preservation, and economic empowerment are vital areas where we must accelerate our efforts. By investing in these areas that support Indigenous women and girls, we can create pathways to success and leadership within our communities. Let us not forget the importance of amplifying the voices of those who have been historically marginalized. Every woman's story adds to our collective strength. We must create safe spaces for these stories to be heard, allowing us to learn from one another and foster solidarity.

As we celebrate the achievements of women today, let us commit to making meaningful action that will drive further change. Together, we can build a brighter, more equitable future for all women and girls in the Northwest

Territories and beyond. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 578-20(1):
CAPITAL PLAN – WINTER ROAD

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year I stated the need for an ice road from Yellowknife to Lutselk'e in order to take the pressure off the cost of living in the community which faces high prices due to the shipping costs despite Lutselk'e only being a fairly short distance away from us here in the NWT capital. I want to revisit this project today and make another case for it completing in the near future because the political context has changed making the ice road even more necessary to both Lutselk'e and the territory as a whole.

First, the cost of living is still out of control and food insecurity is on the rise. My constituents hear about the potential trade war with the United States and are told prices will go up, and they wonder how the prices at their Co-Op store could go any higher than they are now.

Secondly, the building infrastructure in the North is becoming more vital to the overall security of the Arctic and subarctic. We already have major ice roads projects every year, especially supporting industry projects. The Tibbitt and Contwoyto winter road serving the diamond mines is 400 kilometers long. The Tlicho winter road connecting Whati, Gameti, Wekweeti is 200 kilometers long. The idea that the ice road to Lutselk'e is not possible is simply not true. We just need a political will to make it happen. If ice roads are good enough for the industry, then they are good enough for the small community of Lutselk'e.

Later today, I will be calling on the Minister of Infrastructure to commit to a feasibility study on the Yellowknife to Lutselk'e winter road as soon as possible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 579-20(1):
DR. RYAN CONNOR, GOVERNMENT OF
CANADA RECOGNITION AWARD
RECIPIENT

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, to complete this week, recognizing some of the achievements from Yellowknife South constituents, I am including today Dr. Ryan Connor who received the Government of

Canada Emergency Management Exemplary Service Award in February. Dr. Connor is part of a three-person team, including Dr. Anna Coles and Shawne Kokelj, who, since 2020, have made up the Department of Environment and Climate Change's hydrology team. They work diligently to provide situational updates on river breakup and open water flood risks to the GNWT and to affected communities and residents.

Mr. Speaker, their work is not easy. It requires for them to be continuously monitoring changing water levels and ice conditions via satellite imagery, hydrometric gauges, live camera feeds, and also remote sensed data.

Dr. Connor and team consistently provided reports during the high flood risk to many communities to maintain situational awareness, and they shared their data and information with the GNWT as well as territorial and local emergency management organizations. Their dedication to safeguarding communities at risk of flooding is evident in many long hours. This enabled timely updates to first responders regarding changes in water flow and water levels along with a variety of other factors that could have triggered flash floods or floods.

Thank you to Dr. Connor and the other members of the Department of Environment and Climate Change hydrology team and their expertise, their strategic vision, their commitment to public service, their strong relationships with various emergency partners. All together, they have been instrumental in supporting the preparedness and the response measures for flood risk in the Northwest Territories. And so, Mr. Speaker, Dr. Connor and team are very deserving of their award, and I would like to congratulate them on their hard work. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 580-20(1):
DERWIN CLILLE, ELECTRICITY CANADA
LIFESAVING AWARD RECIPIENT

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Colleagues, last August, unfortunately there was a house fire in the community of Jean Marie River. One of the residents, Mr. Derwin Clille, the plant superintendent for NTPC, attended the scene and discovered an elderly person trapped in the burning house. Without thinking of his own safety, Mr. Clille grabbed a ladder and took it to the window and rescued the elder out of the burning house. This fast action by Mr. Clille saved the elder's life. I can tell you the family and community were very thankful for his fast action.

Once NTPC heard of his heroic actions, they nominated him for the Lifesaving Award from Electricity Canada. Electricity Canada's Lifesaving Awards are granted annually to any on-duty employee of an Electricity Canada member company who was involved in a lifesaving attempt or acted to prevent further harm to anyone who needed immediate help.

This past November, the year's award winners were presented at Electricity Canada's Annual Powering Partnerships summit in Toronto. There were four companies who had thirteen outstanding individuals recognized for their quick response. Mr. Clille was able to attend in person to receive this award. I would like to share with you, the following quote with the announcement: The Lifesaving Award reinforces the electricity sector's commitment to safety and well-being. These employees have used their training to go above and beyond the call of duty in times of crisis in their communities. On behalf of the electricity industry, I want to extend our deepest gratitude to the 2024 Lifesaving Award recipients.

Mr. Clille is the plant superintendent in Jean Marie since 2022 where he lives with his wife and three children. I would like to congratulate Derwin for winning this award.

Thank you, colleagues. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife North.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 581-20(1):
AURORA COLLEGE COMMUNITY
LEARNING CENTRES

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, after our public briefing this morning with Aurora College, I want to speak further about the community learning centres because there remains so much misunderstanding and confusion as to what has been happening at the CLCs, what the vision for starting them was in the first place, and then what is the path forward that communities have been trying to sketch out.

The community learning centres are rooted in an initiative started by Frontier College in the 1960s and '70s and was rooted in a philosophy of community development. So that means providing opportunities for all community members to learn and gain skills that are important to them and be empowered in their lives and their self-governance. But over time, as these centres were taken under the wing of Aurora College, the focus narrowed towards upgrading, so focusing on credits people failed to get in high school or things they failed to learn well enough. And it was oriented towards anyone who's available between 9 to 5, so often the unemployed folks.

In some cases, attendance did dwindle and some centres stagnated. But other centres have revitalized themselves through partnerships and have lots of important programs happening that it seems much of the Aurora College leadership, that's based on the campuses, don't seem to be aware of.

In our meeting this morning, an example was offered of a centre in N'dilo and Dettah offering hands-on programs to over a hundred students in trades and various certifications. The response from the college was well, that's a partnership with the Yellowknives Dene so it's not really a college program. But the point is that those are exactly the kinds of partnerships that the CLCs could and should be doing more of to be successful. And that was exactly the recommendation of the What We Heard report that was completed last year for the college and ECE that's recently been published online.

We were told this morning over and over again the world is going digital. But my first reaction was, so why have you gone down and shut down the computer literacy classes at the Literacy Outreach Centre in Yellowknife then?

Saying that the future of learning is online is completely out of touch. It's tone deaf to what is going on now at the community level, the kinds of hands-on learning that communities have been asking for and, frankly, it reveals a lack of imagination and vision.

Through the facilities master plan process, the concept arose for CLCs to become vibrant, community-driven spaces, and hubs for collaboration. I am hopeful they could still become just that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 582-20(1):
MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS IN
COMMUNITIES

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to talk about the income support program. As it is, it is making our young people dependent even though they are capable of doing a lot. I want to mention that this program is doing good for people with disabilities and for seniors. They need that support. This isn't about them, but about the ones that are capable of working and building a life for themselves but are walking around our communities and couch surfing.

I always told people that we come from strong people, and strong people work. They do something to make themselves have a good

life. They do something every day. Like my colleague said, and I agree, we are hardworking. To support our way of life in the North, we need to find ways to get people motivated to take responsibility for their lives. This will help build our economy. This is very important. There is so much to do, and people may need guidance and education to achieve their goals. They will need the support. Mr. Speaker, the sky is the limit, and our people can do and be and have anything they want. They just have to get up and ask for help. Mahsi. I'll have questions for the Minister of ECE. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 583-20(1):
EULOGY FOR IAN LEGAREE

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, it is with deep sadness that I inform this House of the passing of Mr. Ian Legaree, a dedicated public servant, tireless advocate for the North, and champion of youth and community development. Mr. Legaree passed away on January 17, 2025, leaving a legacy of service and a profound impact on countless lives.

Born in Atikokan, Ontario, on July 17, 1959, to Don and Vivien Legaree, Ian's roots reflected Canada's diverse heritage. He met his wife, Shawna Lampi, in Atikokan, and their marriage in 1981 marked the beginning of a remarkable partnership of nearly 44 years. They welcomed three sons: Alexander, Stephen, and Sean.

Mr. Legaree's commitment to the North began in 1984 with a two-year contract that lasted his entire career. From 1989 to 2020, he served as the director of sport, recreation and youth for the Government of the Northwest Territories. He played a pivotal role in numerous projects, including the Arctic Winter Games, the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council, the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games (NWT Program), and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association. His leadership shaped the landscape of sport and recreation in our territory.

His dedication to the Arctic Winter Games was exceptional. Beginning in 1986, he participated in 19 editions of this vital circumpolar celebration, serving in various capacities from mission staff all the way to international director. His contributions to the games are immeasurable, Mr. Speaker.

Beyond his professional life, Mr. Legaree was a passionate volunteer. For over two decades, he

coached and officiated swimming, inspiring countless young athletes, including a decade as head coach of the Yellowknife Polar Bear Swim Club. He also generously contributed to the Yellowknife Community Foundation for 30 years, from its inception. Even after retiring from the GNWT, Mr. Legaree continued to serve the territory, playing key roles in emergency response and recovery efforts during the challenging floods and fires of the early 2020s.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Legaree's contributions have been recognized with numerous accolades including the Paul Harris Fellowship, the David Ramsden Career Excellence Award, Premier's Awards, and the World Leisure Organization Cornelius Westland Humanitarian Award.

Mr. Legaree was a man of diverse interests. He was a dedicated family historian, a keen sports enthusiast, and enjoyed traveling with his wife. He also had a passion for collecting interesting rocks and creating rock gardens.

Mr. Legaree leaves to mourn his wife, Shawna; Alexander and his husband Robin; Stephen and his wife Cindy; Sean Legaree; and his grandchild Burke. He is also survived by his siblings Robin Johnson and her husband Brent; Lorene Legaree and her husband Jeff; Kristi Legaree; and Blaine and Terri-Ann Legaree, as well as numerous nieces, nephews and extended family. He was predeceased by his parents Don and Vivien Legaree, and his niece Meredith Ivall.

Mr. Speaker, the passing of Ian Donald Legaree is a significant loss for the Northwest Territories. He was a true builder of our communities, a dedicated public servant, and a compassionate individual. He will be deeply missed.

A celebration of Mr. Legaree's life will be held on July 17, 2025, at the Legislative Assembly. Donations in his memory may be made to the Ian Legaree Youth Leadership Fund at the Yellowknife Community Foundation.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that this House recognize the extraordinary contributions of Mr. Ian Donald Legaree to our territory and extend our sincere condolences to his family and loved ones. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Our condolences goes out to the family. I had the pleasure of working with the man; he was amazing. So thank God my Member from Frame Lake did that statement here in the House. Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to seek unanimous consent to

move item 6, recognition of visitors in the gallery, up to the current motion, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Member from Frame Lake's seeking unanimous consent to move item number 6 up to. And seeing no nays, Member from Frame Lake.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to recognize my constituent Shawna Lampi-Legaree and her parents, Richard and Jean Lampi's presence in the House today. And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge and thank Alexander Legaree for his help with today's eulogy and ensuring his father was appropriately honoured in the House.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to acknowledge the Member for Hay River South who helped me obtain a Team NWT pin as a small token of acknowledgement of Mr. Legaree's life's work.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to acknowledge my constituent Colin Mahon, who is one of our dedicated pages in the House today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Member from Hay River North.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Premier, I would also like to acknowledge that Ian's family is here with us in the House today. I want to welcome them to the House to share in this celebration of his life and accomplishments. And on behalf of the Government of the Northwest Territories, I want to extend my sincerest condolences. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize Range Lake page Ms. Tyra Ristau. I understand Ms. Ristau's family may be watching our proceedings today, so she's doing a great job; don't worry. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I couldn't go without saying an acknowledgement of Shawna Lampi-Legaree. I've had the honour of knowing her for decades, and it's always a great light to get to see her in person. So thank you.

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

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to extend Happy 94th Birthday wishes to Albert Taniton from Deline. Very blessed to have our dad, which is grandpa, uncle, and lots of friends. Mahsi, and that is coming from the Taniton family.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, on February the 15th, it was my pleasure to, on behalf of this government, award and pass on two medals to Albert Taniton and Leon Modeste there who received the King Charles III Coronation Medals in Deline. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Shawna, welcome, and your parents, Richard and Jean. I haven't met you before, but you got an amazing daughter there, so welcome to our House.

If we missed anyone in the House in the gallery today, welcome to your chambers. Thank you very much for giving us the honour of representing the people of the Northwest Territories. I hope you enjoy the proceedings. It is always nice to see people in the gallery. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Motions. Member from Great Slave.

Motions

MOTION 49-20(1):
APPOINTMENT OF PERSON TO
INVESTIGATE THE CRITICAL INCIDENT OF
AVERY BURKE, WESLEY MARCELLAIS
AND HILARY NORWEGIAN,
CARRIED

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Appointment of Person to Investigate the Critical Incident of Avery Burke, Wesley Marcellais and Hilary Norwegian:

WHEREAS the ongoing effects of colonialism and anti-Indigenous racism continue to impact the healthcare system in the Northwest Territories;

AND WHEREAS an unnecessarily delayed treatment for a treatable illness contributed to the deaths of Avery Burke, Wesley Marcellais and Hillary Norwegian;

AND WHEREAS the families state that the treatment of Avery Burke, Wesley Marcellais and Hilary Norwegian are examples of substandard health care for Indigenous people;

AND WHEREAS clear immediate and measured actions from the Minister of Health

and Social Services are required to prevent such incidents from happening again;

AND WHEREAS Section 25.3 (3.1) of the Hospital Insurance and Health and Social Services Administration Act (the Act) states that the Minister of Health and Social Services shall, when directed by motion of the Legislative Assembly, appoint a person to investigate, in accordance with the Act and the regulations, a critical incident or an alleged critical incident.

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the Member for Deh Cho, that the Minister of Health and Social Services appoints a person to investigate the incident of the treatment of Avery Burke, Wesley Marcellais and Hilary Norwegian;

AND FURTHER, that the Minister of Health and Social Services table before the Assembly at the earliest opportunity any recommendations that the investigator includes in their investigation report alongside a plan to advance such recommendations;

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

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. The motion's in order. To the motion. Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: I have been thinking about Avery Burke for two months. I have been thinking about my nieces and nephews when they were five or six years old, how fun and silly kids are at that age, how desperately heartbreaking it is to lose someone so young.

I have been thinking about this motion for weeks. The more I have heard from colleagues about the lack of basic health services in small communities, the more certain I am that this motion is the right thing to do.

In talking to my colleagues, I am so deeply saddened to hear of the challenges that the communities of the Nahendeh face, and since Avery passed, we have seen Wesley Marcellais and Hilary Norwegian pass away, causing great pain and loss to their families as well. Mr. Speaker, I want to put this motion into historical context.

Many years ago, before we were all here in this House, the Minister of health of the day came to speak to the community leadership in Fort Simpson, explaining that closure of the Fort Simpson Hospital was a good thing. The region and community would not see any impact on services if the hospital was turned into a health centre. The community was told that they would have two doctors and seven nurses, and the

department had a medevac plan in place so those who became seriously ill or had an emergency would be sent to Yellowknife for urgent and emergency care. It would be all good. But it's not working.

In four of the Nahendeh communities, they don't have a health centre but a health cabin. The staff for these cabins, community health representatives, work about four hours a day. Health cabins are also scheduled to have a nurse or sometimes a doctor visit once a month if the weather cooperates for flights. If the weather does not cooperate, communities can go months without seeing a nurse.

Mr. Speaker, these communities do not have the same basic services that other NWT communities have. We have been talking about the equity of health services a lot so far in this year. I hear and believe that the Minister of Health and Social Services when she says that this is priority for the smaller communities. But systemic change is difficult. Access to medical services in Canada should be a basic right but it doesn't seem like that's where we're at, and these problems are most acute in our smallest communities.

Why are we making this particular motion? Well, the communities and families of those who passed want this issue to be finally addressed once and for all. These three individuals did not have to pass away. If the system worked properly, we would not have these highly preventable deaths. These communities feel that this system does not care for them. They feel that they are not important. They simply want access to appropriate care and to be taken seriously in times of an emergency.

I know that the Minister might say that they are following procedures, but I also know that there are examples that Members can point to that all too similar to these circumstances that we were facing in the first two months of 2025 that are addressed in this motion. Our procedures and our system continue to perpetuate the lack of equitable, accessible care. Mr. Speaker, I will have further comments to close off this motion at the appropriate time.

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

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to support this motion in hopes that this does not happen again in our communities. Family relationships are very important in our communities. We treasure our children. We want them to be protected and cared for. Our elders watch our children, and, in most cases,

they care for the community as a whole. Now we have three people who are gone from the community. It is a sad time for these families, and all the community feels the effects of the loss.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot stand here and say this did not happen. I wish we could have these three people at home with their families. But this did happen, and they are gone.

As a Member of this Assembly, it is my responsibility to assist where I can to change something that will serve the people we represent in a helpful way. The healthcare system needs to look at these deaths and address the issue of medevacs at the community level. The community health workers who work at the health cabins in these small communities need higher level training so they're able to help people they work for. They must be trained to know how to save a life by administering lifesaving meds or intravenous fluids. We need the system to work for our constituency we serve. Mr. Speaker, mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Deh Cho. Member from Inuvik Twin Lakes.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by acknowledging the immense grief and pain that these families and communities are experiencing. Losing a loved one is always heartbreaking. And when that loss is sudden and unexpected, the pain can be even deeper. I want to extend my sincere condolences to those affected and recognize their understandable need for answers, accountability, and meaningful change if necessary.

I completely understand the desire to know what happened, why it happened. I completely understand that, the desire to know why it happened and, most importantly, what we as a healthcare system can learn from these tragedies so we can create meaningful change and do everything possible to prevent other families from experiencing this kind of heartbreaking loss. It is critical that we examine these incidents thoroughly and use every tool available to strengthen patient safety.

Mr. Speaker, currently there are three investigations underway through quality assurance framework which the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services uses to identify and investigate patient safety incidents. This framework is designed to improve the quality of care within our health system and to ensure that lessons are learned and acted upon. I understand that these are not critical incident investigations; however, a critical

incident investigation can happen at the same time. And I will ensure that this happens.

Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the families and communities affected that their voices matter, and that these tragedies will not be ignored. We must take every possible step to improve patient safety and ensure accountability in our healthcare system. As this motion makes a recommendation to government, Cabinet will abstain from this vote. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Inuvik Twin Lakes. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. Does the Member from Great Slave wish to close this debate?

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion is an intentionally public process to bring the issue to light of public scrutiny. This is an action Regular Members can take that is significant, holds government to account, and insists that systemic change must happen before more highly preventable deaths do.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the health and social services Minister cares deeply about this issue. I know she wants to make this system work better for all residents. In summary, I believe that this critical incident review will help provide her with some necessary tools to get this urgent work done.

In closing, I would like to request a recorded vote. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

RECORDED VOTE

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland): The Member for Great Slave. The Member for Yellowknife North. The Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. The Member for Deh Cho. The Member for Sahtu. The Member for Range Lake. The Member for Inuvik Boot Lake. The Member for Monfwi. The Member for Frame Lake.

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: Thank you. Those in favour, nine. Opposed, zero. Abstentions, seven. The motion is carried.

---Carried

Motions. Member from Range Lake.

MOTION 50-20(1):
COMPASSIONATE MEDICAL EVACUATION
POLICY,
CARRIED

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS the transportation of patients via emergency ground/air ambulance and highway rescue to health facilities does not fall under the Government of the Northwest Territories medical travel and there is no current policy basis or provision possible for non-medical escort or supports provided to these patients;

AND WHEREAS promoting, protecting, and providing for the health and well-being of the people of the Northwest Territories is the mandate of the health and social services establishment policy;

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

AND WHEREAS patients receiving emergency care can benefit from having the support of family and friends while they receive emergency transportation and medical care.

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, that this Legislative Assembly calls upon the Government of the Northwest Territories to develop and implement a compassionate medical evacuation policy for emergency ground/air ambulance and highway rescue allowing for patients in critical conditions to be accompanied by non-medical escorts;

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

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. The motion is in order. To the motion. Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, we know Northerners face challenges accessing public health care services here in the Northwest Territories. Our constituents are spread out far and wide across this vast land. Then when we cannot expect to offer specialized care in every community, our constituents still expect to enjoy their right to care that they are entitled to as Canadians. This is where health and social

services medical travel policy factors in to break down the barriers of geography and capacity for Northerners to get them to the facilities and treatment options down south which are vital in providing the services that are not offered here.

Regardless of policy imperfections, our constituents are thankful to rely on the connections medical travel staff offer to get them to the medical professionals who are eager to offer their skills to our people. While we can debate here in this chamber adjustments to policy, our appreciation for the support medical travel provides residents of every community remains. On any given week, medical travel could be flying dozens of patients in and out of the territory. Without this work, those patients and their non-medical escorts would be paying thousands of dollars for flights and accommodations contrary to the mandate of the Public Health Act which states clearly that health care must be accessible, and free of financial barrier.

Alongside the support medical travel provides to get patients to their doctors, the next most vital policy priority is granting of support for non-medical escorts for travel. These non-medical escorts, whether they be friends or family members of the patient, are critical to the delivery of medical services which must be accessed outside of a patient's home community. They're necessary in assisting patients to navigate unfamiliar airports, cities, and hospitals. Often, they are needed to understand paperwork, documental, and plans of care. They provide valuable emotional support for patients dealing with tough diagnosis and painful conditions. For Indigenous patients in particular, especially those who are elders, they're necessary to provide cultural assistance and translation. For those with disabilities, a non-medical escort can help them be safe and secure. However, northern patients have -- with very special medical circumstances cannot obtain these vital, non-medical escorts, and not because medical travel -- not because medical travel deemed their non-medical escort unnecessary but because medical travel has no policy regarding these circumstances at all.

I am speaking, of course, about emergency medevacs. Because these flights are not scheduled around pre-approved appointments, no matter how necessary that non-medical escort may be for you, it's just not happening. This is a huge gap in our medical services and something that MLAs have brought to the floor of this chamber many, many times, and not just in this Assembly. When the condition of a patient is so dire that they must be placed on a medevac flight out of their community, it is more than likely due to serious distress or trauma.

While the immediate rush to the appropriate medical centre for lifesaving treatment comes at a huge relief to that patient's family or loved ones, if that patient parent remains in serious condition, or even incapacitation, it would be wholly inappropriate or even irresponsible to leave them in a hospital hundreds of kilometers away without the support of their families.

These family members naturally turn to health and social services for the support needed because they are familiar with medical travel for scheduled appointments, but then they are promptly denied. Even when the doctors and nurses assisting the patient clearly state that a non-medical escort is highly necessary and communicate that fact to the relevant authorities does not make a difference. There was no exception to be made because there was no policy to begin with, and the families end up taking upwards of \$10,000 out of their savings in some cases in order to be by their loved ones' sides.

I want to share with you one of the stories of my Range Lake -- that my Range Lake constituents have brought forward to me over the past year and how they were forced to pay out of pocket travelling to Alberta to support their family members after they were medevaced and remain in an incapacitated state. In one such case, a blood clot in a constituent's brain caused a serious stroke, and he was incapacitated for weeks. In another, a constituent suffered a severe heart attack, developed pneumonia, and then a blood infection, and he too needed his family by his side to help understand his treatment and plan of care. In both cases, doctors implored health and social services to grant a non-medical escort, and they were denied. After these constituents were forced to pay out of pocket, they came to my office for help, and I promised I would do all I could to reach a solution.

Time after time my efforts to find us that solution went nowhere because there was no policy to make an exception towards. If the Minister is not able to find a way to work together to find a solution, then I have taken the next steps necessary to introduce a motion into this Assembly to implore the government to create the policy tools that will remedy this situation and ensure nobody falls through the cracks during a medical emergency ever again. This motion can start the process to close this severe policy gap which is leaving all of our constituents behind. But, also, I want to make clear that this motion is not just another step in my efforts, but it is also responding directly to the needs of my constituents as well. They persevered through these family crises, endured confusion and miscommunication from their government at a time when they should

have been focusing on the health of their loved ones, and they ended up, in fact, paying out of pocket after the system failed them and when they came to my office to tell me enough was enough and they were not going to stop seeking justice until off avenues were exhausted.

I want to commend them for their strength and determination, and I do not want their efforts to be in vain, Mr. Speaker. They have told me time and time again they're not just doing this for themselves but for everyone else in the Northwest Territories so that others do not have to go through what they had to. I'm sure many of my colleagues have had constituents with similar stories. It pains me to think that there are those who are not as fortunate as some of my constituents in being able to scrape together the funds necessary to unite with their loved ones. Imagine if they could not be there, if their family member passed away while they were stuck here in Yellowknife because there was no proper non-medical escort policy for medical evacuations.

I ask that my colleagues support this motion so that we can tell our constituents that during a medical emergency that requires medevac services, we are on their side. This is an opportunity to show Northerners that when we hear their problems, we do not give up on our efforts to fix them; we do whatever is within our power to do so. This policy gap has probably affected dozens, if not hundreds, of Northerners over the years but we can put a stop to it now. So please join me in making sure nobody has to pay out of pocket again in order to support their incapacitated family members in hospitals here in Yellowknife or in southern Canada. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to second this motion. You know, based on the -- all the information and the reasons that my colleague, the Member from Range Lake, so eloquently put, and I won't reiterate all those, just to say, Mr. Speaker, that this is about compassion. It's about doing the right thing. And it's why we're here, Mr. Speaker. So I trust this motion and this important policy work will begin as soon as possible. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. To the motion. Member from Inuvik Twin Lakes.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the motion on the floor that asks for non-medical escorts to

accompany patients on ground and air ambulance and highway rescue vehicles and also a policy for this, one of the areas is for significant safety reasons, emergency medical transport do not support non-medical escorts to accompany patients. In emergency medical transport, the priority is to provide care to the patient. This is not intended to be insensitive to the family or loved ones; however, it's important for safety reasons. Emergency medical transports are unable to accommodate non-medical escorts. These vehicles and aircraft are designed to prioritize lifesaving care, and medical teams must have the space to respond quickly and effectively to any changes in a patient's condition during transport.

During a briefing with Standing Committee on Social Development in July 2024, we discussed the work that was being undertaken at that time to determine options to consider for the escort compassion reasons. This work is underway as part of the improvements being considered for medical travel. I plan to offer an update to the committee on this work early in the new fiscal year.

The area of analysis is planned in phase 2 of the work plan. Once completed, the results will be shared as is committed through the plan to modernization medical travel. A policy change to increase the number of non-medical escorts will significantly impact our system's boarding home and capacity. It would also mean increased costs. The work is underway. We'll review options and impact, including financial impacts, and make recommendations for considerations as part of the business planning. We must continue to ensure that the public funds that we have is done and that it is focused on the delivery of essential health services with a limited budget.

Mr. Speaker, as this motion makes recommendation to the government, Cabinet will abstain from this vote. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Inuvik Twin Lakes. To the motion. Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be supporting the motion, and I appreciate the Member for bringing this forward. I, too, have had many constituents come to me in a situation of having a family member in a critical state, you know, in another province or in another place and not having a way to get to them. And I've also had, you know, medical practitioners coming to me and imploring me that something needs to be done because in their view too, especially if someone gets to a

point where an end of life decision needs to be made, you know, their family members, their loved ones, need to be there with them and helping to make that decision. And I think medical practitioners themselves know that as well as any of the rest of us.

I do understand the Minister's point that it's impractical and often unsafe for an escort to be physically in the ambulance or in a -- like, a medevac helicopter or something with the patient. I can understand that that may not work. But I wonder if a policy, the policy that's being asked for, could accommodate other ways to be able to send, you know, a family member an escort through other means of transportation to then arrive and then be able to be with that patient. So I'm hopeful that other ways can be found to make this happen in a practical and safe way that acknowledges the need.

I mean, I'll also point out the -- I don't know if it's an irony but sort of counterintuitive nature that if someone is well enough to be able to go on medical travel through, say, a regular commercial flight, then they might be eligible for a medical escort but as soon as their condition gets worse to the point where they actually need a medevac, then suddenly they're not eligible to have the escort when they may need that person there, you know, if they're flying to Edmonton, more than ever. And so in that way, the way we currently have it structured just doesn't make sense. And so I would urge the Minister to look at this. I know it's going to cost money, as things do, but I do believe that this is an important area to look at to the folks that are community members who are, you know, in their -- the most difficult and challenging situations that one can face for one's self and one's family members. So I appreciate, once again, the Member for raising this, and I look forward the work that can happen to improve the situation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too will be supporting this motion here. I've encountered, since our election putting us in this building, on numerous occasions welcoming patients that were medevaced to the Stanton Hospital, and I try to ease the pain by being there and then also during discussions of the travel. And as my previous colleagues have mentioned here, I think we can design an accommodation. Circumstances are different. There's some circumstances where I had nothing but cooperation from the Minister of Health and Social Services. There were a few situations, it was -- it varied in different

circumstances there in different situations. We had young, middle aged, and elders on medevac flights, and it would be, I would say, a serious outcome on an elder not having the ability to speak the English language to relate what might be painful during the flight with the paramedics. But those are few and far between. We're very lucky. But if we had a relied and designed policy that would help our system, I think that would be an efficient way to review and modernize our system the best we can, giving us abilities to serve and accommodate the people that put us in this building. Mahsi.

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

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise too as well to support this motion. And it hits home when this motion speaks about the impacts to our small communities, especially in the case of an emergency of loved ones.

I just want to reflect back on the 19th Assembly where I had a constituent in my riding of Dettah where he had to wait six years to get on a transplant list and, finally, the call came in to help out my constituent. And they put him on a plane, on a medevac plane from here to Edmonton for the transplant. And, however, the spouse, the wife, they had no room on that medevac plane for her. And so I got the call, and I wasn't sure what to do, and I brought forward this issue to the Minister of the day, and they couldn't help. So as the MLA, I stepped up and paid for the one-way ticket to send the wife to Edmonton to be by the loved one because through the kidney transplant, we never know what's going to happen. Something could go sideways where -- and somebody had to be there to make a decision, especially the wife. And so to this day, I still get thank-yous from the family for stepping up. And, you know, imagine that, if this is just one of many. And believe me, I've been through this already in my riding of Lutselk'e, Dettah, N'dilo, and members from Yellowknife. And not only here, up and down the Valley as well, that we find ourselves in the same situation. So, Mr. Speaker, I do support this motion. And I just -- you know, we want to work together to create a policy that works for everybody. If there's a way to find the money and work with Government of Canada, let's do it.

Again, I just want to emphasize that health is also a treaty right, and we can't be turning away loved ones that are in need. And believe me, I've been to so many funerals over my lifetime, and more so in the last -- in the 19th and 20th Assembly already; I had my share already and

I'm tired of going to funerals. So I support this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. Member from Range Lake, do you wish to close debate?

MR. TESTART: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the colleagues who spoke joining debate around this motion and, in particular, those who are supporting it. Compassion is the name of the game here, and it's to find a way to develop a compassionate policy that can address these circumstances. And I know these things are complicated. I know medical travel's incredibly expensive and often quite complicated, and I have sympathy for the honourable Minister and her commentary on this motion. However, I think we should get into the business of finding ways to -- reasons how we can overcome challenges instead of just a list of challenges as to why we can't do things. Far too often do we present all the reasons why we can't instead of finding the way -- instead of finding the ways so we can. And in this case, I think the Member for Yellowknife North spoke quite eloquently about this. If it doesn't make sense to put someone in a situation that's unsafe and fly them down with their loved one, then find another way to do that. We're not being prescriptive about how we develop this compassionate policy, only that it be developed, and it be done in a way that we could help people at a time when they're extremely vulnerable, extremely stressed. And not everyone can afford these flights.

I had a constituent who was asked to join a Zoom call while their loved one was comatose and make decisions about their care. Can you imagine that, Mr. Speaker, being put into that situation where you can see through your TV screen your unconscious husband, and you have to make decisions about their care? This is the situation we're trying to address. This is not saying send everyone down regardless. It's in these very particular situations, these very serious, life and death emergencies. Those are the people we want an exemption for. We don't want the policies to change globally; we want an exemption, a compassionate policy developed just so the House is clear on what this motion is calling for. It is not going to open Pandora's Box to, you know, whole new range of costs for medical travel that will already make an unsustainable system even more unsustainable. So I just want to be clear on that. The compassionate grounds is what we're asking for, what this motion is calling for, and

it's long overdue. Because no one should have to pay out of pocket to care for their loved ones.

So thank you, again, to Members for their support and for their comments in the debate. And I will ask for a recorded vote. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. The Member from Range Lake has asked for a recorded vote. Those all in favour, please stand.

RECORDED VOTE

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland): The Member for Range Lake. The Member for Inuvik Boot Lake. The Member for Frame Lake. The Member for Great Slave. The Member for Yellowknife North. The Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh. The Member for Deh Cho. The Member for Sahtu.

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: Colleagues, all those in favour, eight. Opposed, zero. Abstentions, seven. The motion has been passed.

---Carried

Motions. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 610-20(1): CANADIAN RESPONSE TO AMERICAN TARIFFS

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't know if everyone is even aware in this House, but the tariffs have been paused until April 2nd. So this whiplash is, I think, driving everyone nuts. The goalposts keep moving, and I think our entire nation's becoming traumatized. And this is exactly the kind of thing that our new-found enemies, who used to be our allies, want from us. So I'd like to -- I'm sure the Premier has been, as he has been through this whole time, in contact with the Prime Minister, Northerners are looking to their government for stability at a time when it's -- chaos is the only word I can think to describe it. Can the Premier provide an update

to this House on Canada's tariff response. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand from the news that President Trump has put a pause on majority of tariffs that he was imposing on Canada, a pause on all the tariffs on the goods that are -- that fall under the Canada, US, and Mexico Agreement. I understand also from the news that the Prime Minister has said that the retaliatory tariffs will remain despite that pause because the goal is to end all tariffs and the threats of tariffs. And so I know I don't want to be bouncing back and forth, giving different direction to departments, depending on what the President says on a given day, and so from my understanding the Government of Canada is staying the course. But this news broke as we were coming down into the House, I believe, and so I haven't had an official update as of yet. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Premier just confirm that the measures he's already laid out - taking the American products out of liquor stores, the tearing up of the Starlink contracts, and the other measures he's already laid out to date - are those going to be held in force -- are those going to be maintained? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not tearing up contracts. We're ensuring that as we move forward and contracts end and where we can get out of contracts at no cost to the people of the territory and at no -- and in a way that doesn't impact the safety of residents or staff, that we're doing that. So all of that said, the direction that has been given to departments has not changed. I don't want to flip flop back and forth depending on what the news of the day is, and so the direction remains the same. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to hear that. Mr. Speaker, the President, also in his recent address to both chambers of congress -- both Houses of Congress said that the American government would initiate retaliatory tariffs I believe on April 4th. So is there any -- does this situation relate to -- or do our counter-tariffs relate to that declaration? I don't know if there's been an update since then either. I know it's -- again, it is a very fluid situation. If the Premier doesn't have a clear update, that's fine, but obviously this is very concerning for my constituents and

for all of us here in the Northwest Territories and Canada. Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, I don't have an update for the House on that. And, you know, I want to ensure that people understand that, you know, despite the actions of, you know, an individual in the United States, whether -- despite the fact that person might be the President, that, as a country, we remain steadfast in our unity and our approach to dealing with this situation. And, you know, people might be shaken by the removal of the tariffs today and the removal of some tariffs yesterday and the addition of other tariffs. But we're not shaken, Mr. Speaker. This is what we're in for the next four years. We need to realize that. We need to stay the course and ensure that we're doing what we can to further insulate our economy, territorially and nationally, from the whims of the American president while moving forward and supporting each other. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member from the Deh Cho.

QUESTION 611-20(1):
INCOME SUPPORT PROGRAM REVIEW
AND UPDATES

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of ECE in regard to my statement earlier on income support. Is the Minister looking to make changes to the income support program in the future? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the income security programs for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment underwent extensive review and changes in the 19th Assembly. We were able to implement those changes just last year, so they still have not undergone a full year in the new system. And so I think this is a time where we are certainly watching to see how those changes are being implemented so that we can establish if changes -- further changes are needed in the future. Thank you.

MRS. YAKELEYA: One of the questions I had was when will these changes -- how will -- what time do you anticipate the changes will take effect and be the changes that are going to be used in the income support program? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So these changes took effect last year, in the fall of last year, and so

they're still certainly in their infancy as people get used to them and as we see how they're impacting communities. Thank you.

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

MRS. YAKELEYA: I don't know if the Minister will have this information now, Mr. Speaker. But can she tell me what changes were made. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So overall, there was more money afforded to the program. One of the most distinctive changes was that persons with disabilities and people who are elders and seniors were placed into their own separate program, and so now there's the income assistance for persons with disabilities and seniors, and there's the income assistance for adults' program as well. The income assistance for adults' program is for persons who are 19 to 59 years old. And within the income assistance program as well, people -- there were other exemptions that were income exemptions that were included in the program, and then there was also exemptions for earned income that was included as well. So people who are wanting to start working more are able to keep more of their earned income today, so it acts as kind of a grace period as they're working their way out of needing that support on a month-to-month basis. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 612-20(1):
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF LINE
490 REPLACEMENT PROJECT IN NORMAN
WELLS

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following up on my Member's statement, my questions today, as mentioned, are to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. To the Minister, has the Department of ECC been involved in the environmental assessment for the line 490 replacement project in Norman Wells? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the department is participating in the environmental assessment process for both the Imperial Oil line 490 replacement as well as the overall operation of the Norman Wells program. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the Minister is to what degree is the department involved in the 490 process specifically? Mahsi.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the department has submitted several information requests to Imperial Oil to better understand the plans for the line replacement project as well as the implications of the project on the local communities. Also, the purpose of the information requests from the GNWT is to help us make suggestions on potential mitigations, if they are necessary for the proposed line replacement, and several of the requests have been simply seeking clarity on some of the processes. The department is aware that the old line was shut in and Imperial was seeking to replace that line to continue production. And we certainly understand this is an important aspect to help Imperial Oil continue operations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary question is, is the Minister aware that this EA, over 300 questions, have been recently submitted with a very limited response time placed by the board? This is a significant number of information requests for the line replacement project considering there is another environmental assessment in progress for the overall operating authority of the Norman Wells facility and likely another EA coming for the closure facility. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was only recently informed that there were actually 57 information requests which comprised of approximately 350 questions in total that were issued to Imperial Oil for this specific project during the ongoing information requests phase. I'd like to note that the GNWT provided a total of 11 information requests, several of which were seeking clarification from Imperial Oil on some of the aspects of the project.

What I will commit to do, Mr. Speaker, is to ask the department to look into this further and have a discussion with the review board on the intended scope of the assessment process versus the Norman Wells operation, which is also ongoing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 613-20(1):
FEASIBILITY STUDY OF YELLOWKNIFE TO
LUTSELK'E ICE ROAD

MR. EDJERICON: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when the Premier and Cabinet put their name forward for Cabinet at the beginning of the 20th Assembly, one of the things they talked about was to build relationships and collaboration and working with Indigenous governments, and that's what I heard.

When I bring forward issues from my riding that comes from the Indigenous governments and my constituents, so to my question to the Minister of Infrastructure is that will the Minister commit to working with the Lutselk'e Dene First Nation chief and council to a feasibility study on the creation of an ice road from Yellowknife to Lutselk'e at the earliest possible date to help lower the cost of living for the community of Lutselk'e and residents? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's two items in there, and the first one was with respect to having relationships with Indigenous governments, Indigenous leadership. I had the opportunity recently to be -- to travel to Lutselk'e. I work with the chief of Lutselk'e on the Taltson project as a partner and I know, in fact, that the Premier met with the chief of Lutselk'e just today.

That said, Mr. Speaker, a separate question, then, becomes on whether or not initiating a feasibility study is or is not a reflection on the nature of that relationship. Mr. Speaker, I would distinguish the two. An estimate, rough estimate, on a ice road to Lutselk'e is 7 to \$8 million. There's no guarantee that that would -- and, in fact, likely would not -- lower the cost of living. It certainly would not lower the cost of fuel. It's quite a distance. Barging is, in fact, a very economical way of getting fuel to Lutselk'e. And last year, Mr. Speaker, MTS, in fact, conducted an extra load to make sure that everything was getting to the community on time and to ensure that they receive not only fuel but, in fact, housing units as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Between Yellowknife and to Lutselk'e, we're looking about 200 kilometers, no different from between here to Gameti.

My second question is what are the barriers to constructing an ice road to Lutselk'e from Yellowknife? Why can't the GNWT build on the

experience of other large ice road projects such as the Nechalacho ice road from Dettah to Thor Lake? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that's a very fair question. We, in fact, do build -- that estimate I was given of sort of 7, \$8 million, based on the cost of the Tlicho region winter roads; a significant difference being in the Tlicho region, the winter roads are over ice crossings whereas to Lutselk'e, we are looking at crossing Great Slave Lake, which is obviously a huge body of water, behaves extremely differently. There's significant winds, significant movement on a very deep lake. Pressure ridges develop. There's high risks of having open water at any given moment. Significant variances in ice thickness, significant variance in the currents on the lake which is simply not the same kind of engineering as what it might be on a smaller body of water. Different storm events, Mr. Speaker, and an inability to build maintenance camps on land as they would be throughout -- periodically across a different body of water. So, again, quite a significant series of challenges. It's not to say it's impossible but just as an explanation as to why it is much more complicated and much more expensive. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Final supplementary. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah, I appreciate that. The Taltson -- sorry, I guess what I'm thinking about Yellowknife to Lutselk'e is one avenue. The other possibility we could talk about is the Taltson hydro or even from Fort Resolution to Lutselk'e. Would an ice road to Lutselk'e from Yellowknife not be a good fit as part of a larger infrastructure project to secure supply chain and transportation network across the Northwest Territories? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there is, of course, some significant critical minerals deposits not far from Lutselk'e in terms of rare earth elements, and it certainly is, of course, work that's -- we're hoping will be getting underway on a Taltson expansion which would have a cable running under the water but would certainly involve potentially some, you know, work being done in or near Lutselk'e and potentially ending up having to move some equipment. That doesn't necessarily open up having consistent year over year winter road. It simply means that there may be some years where even that high cost can be borne by multiple users. But, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to end on a negative note. The Taltson comment

does certainly remind me that as far as strategic infrastructure in this region, there's an interest now in micro hydro in the Lutselk'e region or Lutselk'e community, and certainly very happy to work with them on that. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 614-20(1):
CLOSURE OF AURORA COLLEGE
COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to continue on the thread that the Member for Yellowknife North brought into the House this afternoon and talk about the community learning centres which we had a presentation about this morning.

Mr. Speaker, it was noted that there's significant challenges faced by the centres. So, Mr. Speaker, why did the department not work with the college to pursue a more hybridized model that might open the door for the college for cost sharing operation of the buildings and partnering in ways that were mentioned by the Member for Yellowknife North? There's certainly no need -- no shortage of need here, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister elaborate more on why this wasn't done. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, in December I was presented by the president and the chairperson with an options paper so that I would know what they were looking at. That options paper had multiple different directions that the board might choose to go on it. Following that meeting, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment sat down with the board to let them know what each of the different options would mean as far as potential costs that would arise or how that would come out of their MOU so that they completely understood that it wasn't, you know, just a one means the other.

Following that, in January I then learned, largely the same day -- well, the day before the rest of the House, what option the board of governors had chosen, and the very next morning that decision was made public. So I was not in a position to be able to work on a hybrid model; that process was not afforded to me. Thank you.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that context. And so that option being taken away from the Minister, I

would note that the college having dropped the centres now provides the Minister with the opportunity to take up that flag herself. So it was noted during the presentation and in the What We Heard report that the college could deliver through the CLCs educational opportunities that respond to chronic staffing shortages in roles in the community - nursing, teaching, social work, or other professions. These are all goals that seek to support our mandate commitment of growing the northern workforce. So considering that opportunity that's been handed to the Minister, what does she plan to do going forward now to help the community learning centre succeed? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely want to acknowledge that ultimately the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has a responsibility to ensure that accessible education is being afforded to communities. Currently, now following the presentation this morning, the committee knows what I know which is that the college intends to switch to online learning and deliver programming like that. They have some data about some great successes in online learning with students across the territory from one end of the territory to the other. And, really, the opportunity here is for me, along with the department of education to sit down and look at all of the details of that programming and be able to determine where some gaps lie. I know some gaps have been raised by the Member for Yellowknife North, and intend to take this time to be able to look at those and see how we can ultimately react. I acknowledge the Member's comments that reacting to these things are not ideal, but that is the situation that I am left with. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just want to highlight one other thing that was in the What We Heard report that I appreciate the Minister posting and that was noted that in the absence of Aurora College offering local post-secondary programming, communities have started forming partnerships with other institutions from outside the territory such as University of Alberta, Wilfrid Laurier University, and Yukon University. So it seems that the college has already, you know, been pushed away or stepped away from this issue. So I'm curious to hear more detail in the coming months, or even today, on what the Minister intends to do to kind of capture what could be lost and just emphasize that I don't personally want to see that loss from the communities. We have a goal of growing their workforce, Mr.

Speaker, so I want to hear what the Minister's doing to achieve that goal. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Member's absolutely right. There's great things happening in this territory right now, and the more that we can talk about them the more and more people will know about them and can take advantage of them.

One of the other things that's also occurring at the same time is some of our development corporations for Indigenous governments are taking on some fairly robust workforce development plans and executing them through on-the-job training and by pairing their goals with programs that are offered through education, culture and employment. For example, our -- oh my goodness, where did it go; it was right on the tip of my tongue. Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

But our workforce development programs, and there are multiple ones within education. And so I think really working with all of our partners within communities and making sure that these programs are, first of all, known about, that they are accessible, and that ultimately community members know where to go depending on what their career goals are. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 615-20(1):
UPDATING THE INCOME ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the changes to income assistance program last year removed the productive choice requirement and the need to seek and maintain employment. Is the Minister aware of any proposals to improve income assistance program for young people looking for work? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In regards to any proposals, if that is referring to future reviews, if there are some kind of scheduled right now, there aren't right now. What we're doing is we're looking at how the program is being implemented throughout the Northwest Territories, the new income assistance programming, and we're very much monitoring how that is flowing out the door given that it is a new program and want to

ensure that we're well informed and up to date with how it's working for Northerners. Thank you.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. For students and young people looking to retrain, payments, including grants and loans that are received for training and education are currently considered unearned income. Can the Minister say if there is any plan to change this so that money received for education purposes does not reduce the income assistance they receive? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the changes to the program did allow for more unearned and earned income to be maintained by residents. Should residents be, you know, full-students or be pursuing post-secondary education, we do have a very robust student financial assistance program that we can move them into that does also come with living allowance supplements as well. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister explain what employment programs are available to young people on income assistance. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, we have career development officers that work for the department of education and their role is to connect, through our client navigators, income assistance clients with job opportunities for people who are able and are willing to take that route. So these career development officers have access to a suite of different workforce development programs that can be paired with an employer. So there is funding, and substantial funding out there, for example for training, for helping to pay a wage for somebody as they learn how to do a job, to really ease some of that stress off an employer who really is wanting to support somebody to improve their skills. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 616-20(1):
CLOSURE OF AURORA COLLEGE
COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES

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

So this morning, Aurora College informed committee that they would be reallocating about \$2 million of the funds that previously went to the community learning centres and CLC staff towards online learning, including hiring three online program coordinators, hiring three new tech support staff, and 1-800 support lines and online platforms, possibly buy everyone a computer as it seems they were promising to ensure that everyone would have access to modern technology.

Does the Minister support this dramatic shift in approach from face-to-face learning to spending those same funds on essentially tech support and online platforms? Does that approach fit within the current mandate agreement laid out given the Minister's expectations of the college? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what I do support here is the college looking at different ways to access our learners across the territory in a more efficient way. What they've identified is that -- concerns over access to the programming that students want. With those additional positions that the Member referenced, there's also six adult learners that will also support that program in addition to tech support and online mentorship and wraparound services. These are the types of services that they could not afford to -- students across the territory before looking at a shift in the programming. And what has been passed along to me is that along with a program that has a borrowing system for hardware, for computer hardware, for students across the Northwest Territories who need it, there will also be people that support with -- you know, how to learn online, student life, being able to really support the whole student holistically.

I think it's also worth noting that there was community learning centres in 19 communities before, and now an additional 10 communities will have access through online learning to these post-secondary programs which afford them not only access to the adult learning and basic education but also the programs that they might want to transition into after that. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So if we fully embrace this vision that the future is digital and if the college changed all of its programs to online programs, does the Minister consider that in that case the college would still

be fulfilling its mandate? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very difficult for me to base all of my answers on hypothetical. I think what the college is looking at doing is exploring how this works for Northerners, and I would expect that they would be consistently evaluating this shift and this change.

The other thing that was referenced today was different opportunities that communities are taking advantage of with additional partnerships both through Indigenous governments and through community governments. And I think that those will continue to flourish in the territory as well. We do have relationships through Dechinta, through College Nordique, through Wilfrid Laurier University, and, of course, Indigenous governments are also forming their own relationships and their own workforce development plans, which I intend to continue to support through our workforce development funding as well. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister justify why we would spend public money on Aurora College developing online programs when many students already access online learning programs from other places and, in fact, that's the entire sort of attraction of online learning, is that you can get it from anywhere. What would Aurora College's niche be in this space? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're certainly at an interesting juncture in the life-span and chapters of Aurora College. So Aurora College has a mandated responsibility for accessing -- or for community members to be able to access educational opportunities. So that still exists within their mandate agreement which is why they continue to find different ways to deliver that programming but because they have autonomy over operations and how they choose to deliver that, that is entirely up to them as a decision. And because of the noninterference clause, I don't have the ability to reach in and tell them to do it how I would like to see it. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 617-20(1):
EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE
FUNDING AGREEMENTS

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today the Minister of Education, Culture

and Employment has signed a deal to extend the Canada-wide child early learning -- learning program, the \$10-a-day program. While families are appreciative of these efforts, daycare providers are still -- or childcare providers are still very concerned about a system that looks to be unsustainable. The funding's been extended until 2031, 2032, without any changes, which means no additional funding to address the concerns that have been raised by the sector or increasing wages for workers in the sector for another five years. I know the Minister's live to these concerns. Can the Minister speak to why no increases in the contributions to the Northwest Territories were secured in this recent extension of the deal? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can promise this House it was not for lack of trying. As the Member also would have seen in the same news article, we weren't alone in resigning that agreement with Canada. That agreement is to the tune of \$80 million over the lifespan of that agreement, and it is very difficult to say no to \$80 million that supports families with young children to access childcare.

I absolutely acknowledge what the Member is saying about the fact that there are challenges with that program and the implementation of it in the Northwest Territories, issues that I very vocally shared with my federal counterparts over the course of the negotiating period. I was incredibly active in speaking with the federal government about ways that that program does not fully satisfy the needs of the Northwest Territories and can also advise the Member because of those conversations, we did not sign the agreement until the 11th hour. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I mean, it's becoming increasingly apparent that this program's not working. I don't think it's working anywhere in Canada. But leaving money on the table is not an option but finding money from within is. So one way we can do that is the funding formulas may be the same across all provinces and territories, as the Minister pointed out, but there's different legislative environments. And in some cases, they allow for extra fees, voluntary fees to be charged in jurisdictions, including Alberta. Will the Minister bring changes to policy and legislation to allow voluntary fees to be charged by childcare providers in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly as previously committed to in this House, that is an aspect of the agreement that I'm currently looking into with the department. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. I've looked into it as well, and you know who else has, Mr. Speaker? Mr. Speaker, the childcare providers and their advocates, the associations, have looked to it -- looked into it as well. They want these changes made. So can the Minister commit to doing more than looking into them and actually change these things, make a commitment to change these things before this problem gets worse. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my concern is implementing or agreeing to something on the floor of the House without doing my due diligence because in the end, we could end up having our agreement cancelled which costs this territory and families in this territory a tremendous amount of money. We would risk losing our agreement with Canada if we are found to be in contravention of it. So I want to ensure that I'm doing my due diligence before making an \$80 million mistake. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 618-20(1):
PRE-FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR
YELLOWKNIFE TO LUTSELK'E ICE ROAD

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just want to make follow-up comments to questions from earlier.

When I talked about the winter road, it was mentioned between 7 to \$8 million. I see that as being an investment for putting the road in like that. But overall, Mr. Speaker, my question would be to the Minister of Infrastructure. I think at this point in time, if we don't start looking for solutions then I'll be back year after year asking the same questions. I think it's important now that we look at maybe building -- when I talk about a pre-feasibility study, it would be nice if we could do that and look at a plan for 5 to 20 years. And when we -- if we do that pre-feasibility study, we could look also at the all-season road, winter road, perhaps even runway expansion, and also, you know, looking at a chip seal program for our community. But before we could even do that, my question to the Minister of Infrastructure: Can we look

at -- get a commitment from her to start a process so that we are able to look at doing a pre-feasibility study on these four items I just talked about? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, pre-feasibility studies are not free. They do involve expenditure of public funds. And now the pre-feasibility study I was being asked about earlier was for a road across Great Slave Lake to the tune of, again, even just preliminary estimates, being 7 to \$8 million every year because the road, of course, melts every single year, and now there's pre-feasibility studies for several other additional projects.

Mr. Speaker, again, on the fly, that's several significant expenditures of public funds for projects that I really don't have a good estimate on other than the one I've already indicated is quite challenging and likely not to lead to a reduction in cost of living. Happy to take the other ones away, look more carefully. There may well have been some pre-feasibility work done at some time. I don't know that standing on the floor so I will certainly make that inquiry and perhaps can start from there in terms of where we can go next. Thank you.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the reason why I'm bringing this up is to really try to identify how we're going to address the issue of the high cost of living in the community of Lutselk'e. So we could get together with the chief and council and talk to them about it, but we need a process to do that. And so I guess what I'm trying to say, Mr. Speaker, is that there needs to be a process now. We have to look at figuring out what the cost might be and plan for 5 to 20 years down the road. But right now at this point in time, you know, we could talk about it but to me, it seems like it's -- I bring it up, and I brought it up in the 19th Assembly, we talk about it, and it's been pushed aside. And at this point in time, we got to look for a solution. And we talk about building a relationship, that's what I'm talking about. So my question again is that can we start working together in partnership and bringing this issue up with the Indigenous governments in Dettah and N'dilo -- sorry, Yellowknives Dene First Nation and Lutselk'e Dene First Nation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, with respect to a concern on high cost of living and looking for solutions, one of those areas where there's high costs is the fact that there's a lot of fuel that has to get transported to the community and a lot of

that is being transported because the community right now of Lutselk'e is running on a diesel generator to generate all of their power. And yet, Mr. Speaker, I do believe there have been some initial scoping studies done about micro hydro facilities. That would reduce the cost of living potentially, certainly bring a more reliable, sustainable power system and one that would reduce the amount of fuel that's being brought in. So that is an area that might have some impact. I don't know for sure. But that's exactly the kind of thing a feasibility study might do. I understand the chief of Lutselk'e has some interest in this. I'm certainly happy to follow up on that. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Final supplementary. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to offer an invitation to the Minister to work together with myself and meet with the YKDFN on their capital needs but also to go to Lutselk'e together and meet with the chief and council and have that dialogue and discussion and next steps going forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'd like to know if the invitation -- I'll put it out there for her to accept. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to return to Lutselk'e. It's always a good experience to be there, a very pleasant and beautiful community, especially if it's fishing season, but certainly happy to go back and further these conversations.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, not that long ago myself and Minister Macdonald were able to meet with YKDFN, both chiefs, in the community of Dettah. Also happy to go back. I expressed at the time that more of those meetings would be good. It took a long time to find a time then. I don't want a lot of time to pass before we can do a follow-up on that meeting. So, again, very happy to be able to say that here, that we're looking forward to continuing the conversations that we began recently. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 619-20(1):
ARCTIC SOVEREIGNTY AND DEFENSE
SPENDING

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my Member's statement, I spoke about the importance of defending Canada's sovereignty and making sure the Northwest Territories is one of the leaders in that effort. Arctic defense

spending has become a national subject of -- or subject of national interest, especially from those who want to be our next Prime Minister. The leader of the opposition has pledged to build a military base in Iqaluit. Next door, our neighbours in Yukon have established a security advisory council, and they've already been successful in finding some federal funding as well. We can't wait for the federal dollars to come to the North because other people are going out to get them. So what is the Premier doing to ensure we have a robust security and sovereignty strategy that brings federal dollars, federal investments into the Northwest Territories, not only for the jobs and the growth but for the safety that our residents deserve? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So when we started this term, Canadian sovereignty and Arctic security weren't on the tops of our list of priorities given that, you know, those are federal mandates; however, they've come to the forefront of discussions all across Canada and especially here in the Northwest Territories. And so a lot of the work that we have been doing actually feeds directly into the notions of sovereignty and security. By advocating for the Mackenzie Valley Highway and putting that infrastructure in place, that is increasing our sovereignty, assuring our security. And that was referenced by Minister Blair in interviews he's done subsequent to the announcement that investment in infrastructure in the North is an assertion of sovereignty. And so we put work into projects like the Mackenzie Valley Highway, like the Taltson Hydro Expansion. We've been putting work into critical minerals. I've been working with my colleagues, particularly the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment and the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, on ensuring that our regulatory system is as efficient as it possibly can be. And, of course, critical minerals are important to Canada's security, Canada's sovereignty, and, you know, North American security ideally but given the current situation, we are focusing on Canada.

I've had a number of conversations with Minister Blair, the Minister of National Defense, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister Joly, Minister Leblanc, all centered around this topic. So we have already been doing the work and we are putting together -- I don't want to say a strategy but we're putting together some guiding -- a guiding document perhaps on how we're going to move forward addressing these issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate those conversations but, I mean, we're asking them to invest in what we're already doing. I mean, we had a Prime Minister -- Prime Minister Harper came here every year and apart from a few big projects here and there that some Members are very familiar with, we didn't get much for it. We're still underfunded. We still need more infrastructure. So what we're looking for here is defense spending, and that's still something we're only starting to see trickle out. We do have the leader of the opposition pledging to build bases in other northern jurisdictions. So can we have a focus on Arctic defense spending as one of the items of an updated federal engagement strategy? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say that when we engage the federal government, we want to package our asks in a way that is going to be palatable for them, in a way that they are going to want to consume. And Arctic security, Arctic sovereignty, is very sellable right now to the federal government, and so the Member can rest assured that it has been and will continue to be a major component of how we engage the federal government. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, allow war packaging that way but unfortunately these projects -- else I'm mistaken, and I invite the Honourable Premier to correct me, but these don't count toward our NATO -- or 2 percent of GDP NATO spending. They don't count. So what I'm trying to do is if we're moving to 2 percent, or maybe even 3 percent now, if we're going the way Europe's going, to divert some of those, if not most of those dollars, into the Northwest Territories. So defense spending is crucial. It's more nuanced than just repackaging our current asks. So can we get a commitment to advance defense spending and specifically tie it to these increases that are coming from our NATO commitments, tie that to the Northwest Territories. And even if the Premier wants to go and speak to the other northern territories and develop a tri-territorial plan or pan-northern plan, I don't care, but let's get some of that money flowing here and make it specific to defense because, again, those projects we're advancing are not -- do not count towards that 2 percent. Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So if we're speaking specifically about defense infrastructure, that's something we have to leave up to the military. I don't have the wherewithal to tell the military where they

should build a base to best deter the Russians or anything like that. That being said, we -- I've been having conversations, as I mentioned earlier. I spoke with Minister Blair earlier this week and I said that, you know, it's important that we are involved when they are putting their mind towards military spending. If there's going to be an expansion of, say, in Inuvik of the military presence, well, we might need to upgrade the water treatment plant, we might need more childcare, we might need other types of infrastructure that would generally be municipal or territorial, and so ensuring that that happens. And so we are working with the federal government to ensure that when they decide on how they're going to spend this money for their military installations that we are going to be part of those discussions and that Northerners and northern companies and Indigenous governments will all benefit. So, you know, I could go on and on about this; perhaps I'll just leave it at that. Thank you.

Oh, I remember what I was going to say. The announcement as well, from Minister Blair, was not just an announcement of the forward operating support hub locations but also an increase in the amount of money going towards those facilities. So we've already seen a significant increase in the commitment of the federal government on defense spending in the North. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Oral questions. Mr. Clerk.

FOLLOW-UP TO ORAL QUESTION 568-

20(1):

LOWEST RETURN AIRFARE FOR INCOME TAX RETURNS

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Rule 7.27, I have received follow-up information for Oral Question 568-20(1), Lowest Return Airfare for Income Tax Returns, asked on February 28th, 2025, by the Member for Great Slave to the Minister of Finance.

Further to the response provided to the Member for Great Slave on February 28, 2025, regarding Lowest Return Airfare for Income Tax Returns and the indexing of northern resident's tax deduction since 2023, the following additional information is provided:

The northern residents travel deduction requires applicants to determine the lowest return airfare for their calculation. The lowest return airfare is the cost of the cheapest round-trip airfare available when the applicant's travel began, between the airport closest to their residence and the nearest designated city, which for the Northwest Territories is

Edmonton. Northwest Territories residents can determine the lowest return airfare amount to claim their travel deductions by gathering documentation to support the quoted return airfare between the airport closest to their community of residence and Edmonton on, or close to, the date of the travel or they can use the Canada Revenue Agency's lowest return airfare tables.

Following consultations with Canadians, the Canada Revenue Agency started to provide lowest return airfare tables as a convenience for tax filers who do not want to take the extra effort of collecting documentation. However, Northwest Territories residents still have a choice. They can determine the lowest return airfare amount to claim their travel deductions by gathering documentation to support the quoted return airfare between the airport closest to their community of residence and Edmonton on, or close to, the date of the travel or they can use the Canada Revenue Agency's lowest return airfare tables.

Using the Canada Revenue Agency's tables is the most convenient method because these amounts are readily available, will not be disputed by the Agency, and do not require further documentation. However, the Canada Revenue Agency determines the annual tables by working with a business travel service provider to determine the lowest economy fares that are ordinarily available during a quarter for airlines operating in the prescribed zones, using prices for flights between eligible airports and designated cities. Tax filers who are not satisfied with the Canada Revenue Agency's tables can check for the lowest economy return airfare from the Northwest Territories tax filer's community to Edmonton on the day they are travelling and save the information in case the Canada Revenue Agency checks. In most cases what the traveller paid will be lower than the lowest economy return airfare purchased on the day of travel.

The Canada Revenue Agency administers the Northwest Territories' income taxes and should be the first source for Northwest Territories residents to use for questions on filing their income taxes. For help on any income tax topic, Northwest Territories residents can contact the dedicated telephone service for territorial residents at 1-866-426-1527, which the Canada Revenue Agency set up to assist Northerners with individual tax and benefit enquiries.

With respect to indexing the Northern Residents Deduction, I have not raised this issue with the federal Finance Minister since 2023. The Northern Residents Deduction changes taxable income and so a request to

index the Northern Residents Deduction is complicated by the tax collection agreements between Canada and all provinces and territories except Quebec that require the same definition of taxable personal income. The Northern Residents Deduction reduces personal income tax revenues and so requesting that the Northern Residents Deduction residency component be indexed for inflation requires the support of other territories and can be challenging to advocate for if other provinces perceive additional benefits flowing to the territories as not necessary, which has been the case in the past. The Department of Finance will update its analysis on indexing and provide this to the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight by the end April 2025.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 620-20(1):
PHYSICAL ASSETS OF AURORA COLLEGE
COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES

MR. TESTART: Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, sorry, I was confused by our procedures. Mr. Speaker, I too would like to ask just some clarifying points from the presentation that Aurora College gave to Members this morning.

For the physical assets of the community learning centres, the actual buildings and physical infrastructure that are present in the communities, what is the fate of that with the shuttering of all these facilities in a couple months? Thank you. What will be the fate?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, for the facilities that are owned by the Government of the Northwest Territories, the Department of Infrastructure does have an asset disposal policy. While it is imperative that we follow that policy, I also feel that it is imperative that we also speak with communities to find out what their intent is as well, to make sure that we have an open conversation about those assets. We have had outreach from some communities indicating what they would like to use their local community learning centre for, and so continuing those conversations is paramount.

And then in addition to that, there are some facilities that are being used, for example, as classroom space, and so that will be very

important that they continue to be that. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, so these -- we've heard that there's -- we've heard directly -- Members have heard directly from people working in some of these facilities that they're seeing clients, you know, there's some that are very productive. So is there a pathway that the Minister can take -- can keep these facilities going under a different mandate, keep the staff going, doing the work they're doing of offering programs, and then, you know, the ones that are less productive, maybe hand those over to the local authorities, whatever they may be. But, like, I think what Member -- what communities are concerned with is you have some of these places are working really effectively. They employ people. They see people. The Dettah, N'dilo facilities, a hundred people over -- or a hundred students and training them over 18 months. So is the Minister willing to take this on and bring these back under ECE? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that would be a pretty significant budgetary ask and, at the same time, a building is just a building without the staff that need to go along with it. So that is not a question that I have an answer to right here on the floor of the House, and I think certainly would have more information as more of these details get ironed out. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a fantastic solution which is the money that Aurora College that is still being granted to them, take that back and use it to fund these facilities. So will the Minister pursue an exploration with that and see how we can keep these -- the productive facilities that are training students, that are important to communities, that are employing local people who will not have jobs when they're gone, stay open. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, with some of the funding that Aurora College has, they intend to continue -- to pay out staff using their staff retention policy. Some of that funding is being shifted to their online version of the adult learning and basic education. And then some of that funding is going to support the development of their Bachelor of Education, their diploma of social work. They're working on their made-in-the North degree. They're working on -- they shared with this House programming for dental therapy up in Inuvik.

And so there's a lot of programming that they're working on in order to offer that to students across the Northwest Territories. And so it's not funding that they are simply pocketing for better -- better use of that word but is certainly funding that they intend to reinvest in ensuring that Northerners have access to education. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Colleagues, we will take a brief break to give our translators an opportunity to take a break.

---SHORT RECESS

MR. SPEAKER: Colleagues. Written questions. Member from Range Lake.

Written Questions

WRITTEN QUESTION 14-20(1): OPERATING ROOMS AT STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the following questions for the Minister of health and social services concerning the productivity of operating rooms at Stanton Territorial Hospital:

1. How many scheduled surgeries and day procedures were completed in 2024, broken down per month;
2. What are the total hours worked by all surgical teams for the year 2024;
3. How many surgeries and day procedures were cancelled over the same time period;
4. Will the Minister provide a full cost accounting of all scheduled surgeries and day procedures completed in 2024; and
5. Will the Minister provide a full cost accounting of all scheduled surgeries and day procedures completed in 2024?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Tabling of documents. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 302-20(1):
AURORA COLLEGE ANNUAL REPORT
2023-2024

TABLED DOCUMENT 303-20(1):
AURORA COLLEGE CORPORATE PLAN
2024-2025

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the following two documents: Aurora College Annual Report 2023-2024 and College Corporate Plan 2024-2025. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion for first reading of bills. Minister of Justice.

Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Wednesday, March 12th, 2025, I will present Bill 23, An Act to Amend the Children's Law Act, to be read for the first time. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Justice. Notices of motion for first reading of bills. Minister of Justice.

BILL 24:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE FAMILY LAW ACT

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Wednesday, March 12th, 2025, I will present Bill 24, An Act to Amend the Family Law Act, to be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Justice. Notices of motion for first reading bills. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters. Tabled Document 275-20(1), with the Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

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

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

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Yes, please.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

Would the Minister please introduce her witnesses.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To my left, I have assistant deputy minister Melissa Cyr. And to my right, I have director of corporate services Nina Salvador.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. The committee has agreed to forego general comments. Does the committee agree to proceed to the detail contained in the tabled document? Committee?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Committee, we will defer the departmental summary and review the estimates by activity summary beginning with corporate management starting on page 234 with information items on page 236. Are there any questions? Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you -- I guess my earpiece just isn't working. Sorry, Mr. Chair. I assume that the first page is a good spot to ask questions about the business plans.

On page 260 of the business plans, it talks about releasing an economic vision. I just wanted to ask about the -- understand more about what they're doing, why it wasn't started

this year, and what the expected timeline is. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the economic vision exercise that's being done is being worked on with multiple stakeholders across the territory. We have presented to Council of Leaders, and Council of Leaders has formed a working group with officials that Indigenous governments have selected. Following that, this year we will also be working with additional stakeholders across the territory outside of government so that we are creating an economic vision which is largely a statement with principles and values associated with it, and our goal is for every Northerner to be able to see themselves in this statement so that it is something that, at the end of the day, we are putting together as a team and that we can all take outside of the territory together. So when we're doing investment attraction, whether or not it is an Indigenous government, a municipal government, or a resident of the territory, we're all speaking the same language together and all essentially hustling in the same direction. The goal for this work to be done is in the fall of this year, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm a bit surprised to hear the ambitious timeline considering it's spring of this year that we're already hoping to have this out the door by fall, although I'm not going to sit here and discourage the department from getting work done quickly. And I appreciate the department noting the need for and development of an investment strategy following development of the vision. And I think that's a great -- you know, that's a great order of operations there. You want to establish the vision and then what are you going to do to implement it. So great planning there.

The only question I would have is, you know, it wasn't that long ago that the government established regional economic development plans. So how do those fit into this? If we've developed regional economic developmental planning, I have to assume that those plans haven't been finished and completed and job well done. So is this going to supercede those; is it going to work in concert with them; are they a totally separate thing? Can the Minister help us better understand how this all goes together and works together. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So we certainly use that work as a basis for this work. But that work is certainly, as the Member referenced, absolutely not done. The economic plans from regions speak to things that were identified by people within the region of what they are interested in and what they would like to see investment in. So those were things like agriculture and tourism and really speak to regional specific economic development opportunity whereas the economic vision really is a whole of territory approach and doesn't speak directly to specific sectors, so to speak, necessarily. It speaks more to a global vision for the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I am curious, I mean, considering that incredibly ambitious timeline, are MLAs or the economic development and environment committee going to be brought into that process at all, or is this going to be done kind of completely outside of the Assembly's contributions? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, I absolutely want the voices of committee to be involved in this work. And so between the months of April and July, there will be an engagement period that will include Indigenous governments, the public, stakeholders, and certainly committee and MLAs as well. There will be a draft discussion paper that will be produced from there and engagement -- sorry, engagement results collated and organized and then also facilitated visioning sessions that will be done through ITI themselves and then in the fall, so in November roughly, release of an NWT economic vision. But to the Member's question, yes, I absolutely want to be able to have every Northerner, should they wish to participate, see themselves reflected in this work, and that includes Members of standing committee.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And can the Minister discuss what kind of expert economic analysis is going to be applied to the economic visioning in particular -- yeah, and how it's going to kind of lead into investment strategy. I am curious to hear because, you know, the Minister will remember I made a statement about this a number of sittings ago. I

was speaking about the Greenland Economic Council and how they applied economic analysis of the current state of Greenland and how, you know, targeted investment in certain areas would help change that and move things along. I would notice that Ontario publishes a report like that annually. I'm just curious what kind of analysis -- because, I mean, it's great to go out and talk to people, but it's also great to employ the advice of experts who understand macroeconomic planning and understand how investment can move the needle on certain things. So I'm curious to know what kind of expertise the department would be employing as they develop this vision to ensure that it is effective and not effectively just a What We Heard report turned into a vision. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through yourself, I would like to pass to assistant deputy minister Cyr.

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

MS. MELISSA CYR: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So with regards to the data that -- the data analysis that we conducted for that research, right now the first step -- this is being through the economic development working group through the NWT Council of Leaders -- we are using the basis of the RDPs as the first step and from there, where we're going to identify any gaps that are -- any gaps in the data. And after, once we identify those gaps, we will then reach out to perhaps academic institutions on who can help us, would be best placed to do that economic analysis going forward.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I appreciate that answer from the department and would just again -- yeah, just re-emphasize the point that, yeah, I would like to see a combination of the voices of the NWT enhanced by expert analysis and then planning for how we can move the needle in certain sectors because it does take -- it does take a well laid plan in order to get action that would be effective. So thank you. Those are all my comments I think on the business plan. Let me just check my notes before I cede the chair.

Those are my business plan related comments. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Next on my list I have got the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I was just refreshing my memory through the business plan and this, I think, specifically speaks to policy work in corporate management so I hope it's appropriate for me to ask here.

I was, you know, grateful to be able to attend the NWT Association of Communities AGM last weekend, and there was a lot of conversation in the bear pit around emergency management and I was looking at ITI's items under -- or sorry, emergency management and business continuity. And it says here that you are developing guidelines in partnership with the chambers of commerce, another important partner to make sure we're all prepared for any emergency that might come our way. It also says that you're expecting this to be published in the spring. Can I please get an update on that work, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through yourself, I'd like to pass to assistant deputy minister Cyr.

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

MS. MELISSA CYR: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So with regards to the business continuity guidelines that we're working in concert with the city of Yellowknife and the NWT chambers, we are looking to publish that. We're just in the final steps of approvals from the various chambers, and we're hoping to release that in hopefully early spring before the fire season.

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

MS. REID: Thank you. That's great to hear. So how are you working with industry on specific needs targeted to various NWT regions on that? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we're working through MACA. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for that clarification. That gives a little bit better in my mind so that is good to hear.

I am curious, following up on the questions from my colleague from Frame Lake around the economic vision and sort of visionary pieces.

Could additional information be provided on the pan-territorial resources investment marketing initiative and how that relates to the economic vision that work is being done? Thank you, Mr. Chair

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, that initiative is focused on really investment attraction for critical minerals. This past week, on Sunday night at PDAC in Toronto, we were able to host an event in conjunction with Nunavut and the Yukon, and it was incredibly well attended by both politicians, investment individuals, and business owners. And so we hope to continue to build off that momentum. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Great to hear. And also in your business plan, I believe under economy because that's your largest section, which makes sense, we're speaking about implementing actions under the priorities for critical minerals in the NWT. How is that work going along? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, certainly we are working on everything to do with critical minerals on basically a daily basis within the department, especially this time of year. I've just come off of a bit of a whirlwind of critical mineral events, both in Vancouver and Toronto. We continue to advance critical mineral work on all fronts, including in our geoscience database building, in our investment attraction, in making sure that we're informing the world about all the projects that are on the go here in the Northwest Territories. And we also have our Northwest Territories geological survey that is consistently successfully leveraging money from federal funding pots, and they do just incredible work and I can't toot their horn enough. So thank you.

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

MS. REID: I don't know how to respond to toot your horn.

MR. MORSE: You don't have a clever pun?

MS. REID: I don't. I'm really tired today, Mr. Chair. But, you know, I appreciate that. Maybe a more detailed breakdown of what actions are completed and what are -- were still outstanding

would be great to share with Members. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, if possible, one of the things that I'm going to do today is swap out different staff when we get to different sections and so maybe we can come back around to that when we get to the petroleum -- minerals and petroleum resources section of the main estimates today. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nothing further.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Is there any more questions from Members? Seeing none, no further questions, please turn to page 235.

Industry, Tourism and Investment, corporate operation, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$10,243,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Go down to economic diversification and business support beginning on page 237 with information items on page 242. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, my first question -- I know it was a small item, but I note that advancing the knowledge economy item is removed this year. I just want to know what have we lost there, if the Minister can help us understand it better. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we had some funding that was allocated to this work and, unfortunately, that funding has been sunset and so we no longer have that funding within the advancing the knowledge economy section. So those contributions were for planning, research, and public engagement on advancing the knowledge economy, enhancing business support services in NWT regions, and the development of regional economic development plans. And as we've already talked about as well today, those regional economic development plans are now available online. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. What's going on next to me here; what's all this waving about?

Mr. Chair, the next question I had was when will the program review of the SEED policy be completed? And also how will the department ensure that SEED funding supports mentorship and capacity building? Thank you -- or, actually, you know what, let's go one question at a time. When will the program review of the SEED policy be completed? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we go out with an RFP to do a complete review of this program in April of this year. And with that, we will do a very robust review of the SEED program with the intent of releasing a new policy next year. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that's it. Give me one second here. Sorry, I've got like four pages of notes. Yeah, no, I wanted to ask a couple more questions about SEED. So how will the department ensure that SEED funding supports mentorship and capacity building through this review? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, nothing is off the table with the review. We intend to do a very wholistic review of the program from start to finish and everything in between. The program, as it currently stands, does have both of those things, and so that will be a very natural input into the review. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And certainly I can just say, you know, I hope that this comes up during the review but something that was pointed out to me by constituents, who are small business owners, is certainly ITI's been really good at getting -- helping businesses get off the ground, and the SEED program's been great for that. But what I've heard people are struggling with is, you know, they get a bit of support to get off the ground but maintaining a business in the Northwest

Territories can be really challenging. And so that's one piece of feedback. I don't need a response from the Minister unless she's interested in commenting. But that was a piece of feedback I heard at the doors and stuck with me that we -- you know, just as important as fostering new is ensuring that we maintain what's existing so that, you know, we don't have this constant kind of hamster wheel of businesses opening and closing, opening and closing. You want things to sustain, for people to have a sustainable employment and sustainable income. So that's maybe something we can look into with the SEED program, ways that we can shift into kind of better support for maintenance -- maintaining kind of momentum. Thank you, Mr. Chair. If the (audio) --

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, as a business owner who has actually dabbled in the SEED program, I certainly have my own ideas of how to improve the program. The program itself is not meant to be something that people apply for every year. It is meant to be a piece that really propels businesses to the next level. There are Northerners who have used SEED program in order to write business plans and get support in that sense to ensure that they are putting together a business idea and the supports that go along with it that make a robust and self-reliant business plan at the end of the day. If people are looking for kind of the next stage of game changer investment in their businesses, there are additional programs that the Government of the Northwest Territories does have to support that, whether that's through Community Futures or through Prosper NWT, there are kind of a spectrum. But one of the things that this SEED review really is lending to is to ensure that we are affording Northerners access to that spectrum of support services and investments into business growth in the territory. And one of the best ways, really, to ensure that our local businesses are supported is to ensure that we are supporting local as residents and to ensure that we are all contributing to growing our economy at the end of the day because a healthy economy supports a healthy economy. So thank you for the Member's comments, and I certainly take them to heart.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, in this activity, ITI is budgeting a \$2.2 million reduction for economic diversification, which is

a little concerning considering where we're at in the geopolitical world that has been thrust upon us. So can the department please provide more clarity on this reduction. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. What the Member is seeing there, and the difference is the investment in the fish plant. So we have been working to build and open a fish plant in Hay River, and we are no longer needing that -- that's what is not represented there, is the fish plant money. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And that is good information to know, but -- so is it anticipated or expected that as we start to have our economic vision developed into the fall, and possibly into next year actions rolling out of that, you will be seeking investment into new diversification streams, or is there anything sort of contemplated in the, like, initial stages of trying to expand or diversification options? I know we've had a lot of success with the film industry. I know the Minister is a big fan of supporting the arts, but are there any other visions on her horizon that she'd like to talk about right now? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And I love this question because I love the opportunity to talk about the fact that we have a diverse economy in the Northwest Territories and really what we're doing at this point is ensuring that we're supporting the diversity of our economy. And so we have programs that support agriculture, tourism. We have, you know, the -- sorry, the Member mentioned film. We have a film program that continues to grow because the multipliers for our film projects in the territory are incredible. It's got almost a 9 to 1 multiplier. And so investing there really is investing in an economy, in a sector, that continues to propel our dollars further.

We also have programs, like our SEED program, that really call upon residents of what do you want us to invest in and allow for that massive spectrum to already happen. And so the economic vision really is about how we present ourselves and sell ourselves as a territory to the rest of the world. And I really foresee under that that the sky is the limit. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. No, appreciate that. Looking very much forward to the vision coming out this fall, hopefully even perhaps earlier if the department is super keen and wants to get it out the door.

Further to that, and the sky being the limit, I would like to echo some of the comments that my colleague from Frame Lake has said since beginning his tenure here in this House that, you know, economic diversification used to include contributions for planning, research, and public engagement on advancing the knowledge economy. So I don't want to walk backwards into question period and the Pandora's Box that is Aurora College at the moment, but I do want to ask the Minister if that is still something that's being contemplated here in this activity. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, myself and department staff have a very good working relationship with CanNor, and we are always looking for ways to identify new funds and use ITI funds in a stackable way. We're always looking to maximize our investment in anything that we do, and we'll certainly continue to do that. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nothing further.

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

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Back in I guess late 2023, the department did a review of its business incentive policy. I know because when they did do some consultation and information sessions in the regions, and particularly in Inuvik, it was during my campaign actually the time I attended one. And one of the updates they were looking at doing for the BIP was to around -- we'll call them enforcement, but putting teeth into the policy to ensure that contractors that were filling out the BIP forms were then obviously following up on those BIP forms and ensuring that what was stated in the forms was what was happening and that the northern -- certainly northern businesses were taking advantage -- able to take advantage of that -- of those projects.

I am just wondering if the Minister can kind of give an update as to since that review has taken place, what's been happening now since that review, and have those changes been implemented and if they have, how has that process been working. Mr. Chair, thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we have the vendor performance policy that was implemented. This is the first step through what the Member is referring to and having some teeth in that. That policy is held over in the Department of Finance, and we have been co-hosting online training sessions with staff to ensure that they understand it as well. And those training sessions, I should say, are both internal and external so it's not solely just for staff. It's also for business entities in the Northwest Territories. And this is a policy that we continue to implement in order to address that concern. Thank you.

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

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, yeah, the issue has been -- and, listen, I've been involved with BIP through other parts of my career and, again, we see a lot of times where, you know, a contractor or someone will fill out those forms, put in the northern content, and then not necessarily follow up on the northern content and the problem was, you know, if you wait until you're halfway through a \$20 million contract to realize that, you know, we haven't, you know -- those intentions weren't followed, then it's likely too late. So one of the -- you know, it'll cost you way more to have to go out and re-tender that as it would to, you know -- and cancel the contract. So from what I understood, that review of that contract now is going to take place earlier in the process versus halfway through the contract or later in the contract. So I understand what the Minister is saying, that the policy has been developed but has that come into force, Mr. Chair?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, yes, it has come into force but it's being implemented in a phased approach. So for contracts over \$250,000, it has been implemented and enforced. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'll go back to the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you for that. And, you know -- and, you know, to be fair, I think it was -- the consultation process that was done in Inuvik, certainly that I attended, was very informative and I think, you know, for contractors and builders alike, I think it was welcomed to have some teeth come in that program.

Is the department tracking in any way now, I guess the performance, you know, versus what it was pre- having this new policy; is there data being kept on that now, Mr. Chair?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, yes, there's data; however, the finer details of that data would be better -- questions better placed to my colleague from the Department of Finance. They're the ones who maintain that policy and maintain the data that goes with it. Thank you.

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

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And that sounds like something for a Member's statement next week, but I certainly appreciate the answers. No further questions in this section. Thank you.

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

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wanted to find out -- and you probably -- well, Mr. Chair, how many new companies registered for BIP since last year, I guess; does the Minister have any of that information? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So we are up to a total of 1400 businesses in the Northwest Territories.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from the Sahtu. My apologies, the Member from the Deh Cho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: When will the -- when will companies not use a BIP -- not use a local BIP company? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So I think the question is in

regards to when would the government not use a local BIP'd company or -- yes? Okay.

So the government puts out tenders through procurement shared services over in the Department of Finance. And then depending on what -- or who applies for the different programs and the status of those programs, they would be assigned bid adjustments that would be based on our business incentive policy if they qualify and match the criteria. And then those bid adjustments would then help procurement shared services determine who is the successful bidder in a project. Thank you.

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

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you for that. And another question for -- is on Prosper NWT. How does Prosper NWT support -- what companies do they support in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, between April 2005 to March 2024, Prosper NWT has supported 741 businesses across the Northwest Territories. So I certainly couldn't list them all out here but -- and then through those 741 businesses, they have disbursed approximately \$128 million. But it might be of interest to Members -- and mind you these are regional areas, not political areas -- but:

- 162 businesses from the South Slave, that was 40 percent of the funds disbursed, \$52 million;
- 386 businesses in the North Slave, that was \$30 million, or 24 percent of funds disbursed;
- 60 businesses in the Deh Cho, which is \$21 million or 16 percent of funds disbursed;
- Beaufort Delta is 106 businesses, \$15 million or 12 percent of funds disbursed;
- And then finally in the Sahtu region, 27 businesses or \$10 million which was 8 percent of the funds disbursed.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MRS. YAKELEYA: Can the Minister tell me what support is provided in the support given by Prosper NWT to the companies. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the programs and services afforded by Prosper NWT are everything from debt financing, which is primarily in the form of loans, venture investments, digital support programs, and also business services. So for example in the form of accounting or human resources support as well. Thank you.

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

MRS. YAKELEYA: Companies like Dene Fur Clouds, they're a for-profit company; correct?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, companies like Dene Fur Cloud are a subsidiary of Prosper NWT so is not counted in that previous area that I identified. So there a number of subsidiaries that Prosper NWT does support, and they are certainly for-profit companies, and Prosper NWT is working with them to continue to develop their business practices. Thank you.

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

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Is it hoped that eventually Dene Fur Clouds would be totally independent and on its own? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So that is certainly my hope for every single one of the subsidiaries, that they are supported to develop business plans and business practices that make them wholly independent from Prosper NWT. I have asked the Prosper NWT, along with their board, and their board has made the same request to Prosper, to look at plans to move out of having to support these subsidiaries. So there's just under nine full-time staff that work at them across the -- well, in the communities where they are present, and the cost to Prosper is over a \$1 million. And so ensuring that these businesses operate as a business and are empowered to become revenue positive is incredibly important to me and also to the board of Prosper NWT.

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

MRS. YAKELEYA: That's basically it for me. Thank you.

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

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is on the expenditure side on 238. It seems that the compensation and benefits went up and grants, contributions and transfers went down. Did we, or is it part of this activity going to see additional staff being hired because of that compensation and benefits increase?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This isn't additional staff. It's additional compensation and benefits through the UNW collective agreement. Thank you.

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

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks to the Minister for that clarification. I'm just wondering if there's any willingness, I would say, into this bargaining season and I must compliment or acknowledge the support from the Minister for last year's no bargaining activities to the Sahtu; now this year I see a blank in that category on page 239. Is the Minister open to reviewing this with the possibility that we may not have a barge again this year for entertaining relief? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the Member for the question. I'd like to start off by acknowledging that it has certainly been a very difficult time for the Sahtu with the cancellation of the barge season and the impacts of climate change on Sahtu communities.

The barge cancellation program was a one-time program that we launched in recognition of the very difficult season that the Sahtu endured and certainly we, you know, hoped that water will come back. We know that it's predicted to be another dry year, and so we continue to encourage people to get insurance, especially businesses, to have shipping insurance beforehand and be prepared for low bargaining. We've encouraged people to try and bring as much stuff up on the winter road as absolutely possible now that we are in the leeway of that, to really work as hard as they can and as much as possible to prepare in advance. And I know that my colleague over at the Department of Infrastructure has equally

worked very hard to make sure that fuel both on the part of the GNWT and has encouraged Imperial also to make sure that their fuel supplies and fuel sources are up on the winter road as well. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): I'm going to go to the Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: I'll acknowledge that as a possible door invitation for further negotiations. Nothing further on this activity there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'd like to just talk about the film industry for a minute. I see the budget's doubled, which is good, and we heard about the multiplier earlier today. But one of the issues with this is it's still a very small rebate program versus other larger jurisdictions. So is this -- I guess, is the intention to this more on the arts side to support northern filmmakers, or is it more on the economy side to grow a film sector, and -- well, let's just start there. Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, it really certainly does fulfill both. Certainly the drive and putting that much money into it is an economic driver but it also supports local artists, and it's an incredible mentorship opportunity. I had the great joy of going recently out on to one of these film sets and was absolutely tickled to see that there was multiple staff members who are grown up in the territory who had come back to mentor other people within the industry who were working on the film set as well. And so it was really neat to have this cohort of Northerners kind of come full circle and come together to prop up the industry. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And that sounds like a great experience. I was -- had an experience with a US film production in my previous employment in, Mr. Chair, your community of Dettah, and it was really significant to see how much opportunity brought to the community and to see the late Chief Eddie Sangris shake Hilary Swank's hand was really exciting as well. So this can really bring Northerners -- or bring the North to Hollywood or to that larger film industry and bring, of course, film industry here locally.

The issue is this rebate is -- like, no one's going to complain about it. This is good that it's there. It's very, very small. And if you're looking to build an industry around a rebate program, which basically every jurisdiction does. The reason they film in, you know, European countries, small European countries, you know, like, why are productions setting up there, it's because their film -- how their film rebates are structured.

This could be an area where we could attract a lot more -- or more productions to and also support local filmmakers as well if we expanded this program, but it's going to take a significant amount of expansion. Not \$1 million or \$1.5 million, but tens of millions if we want to take it seriously and really grow our industry here.

Is there any possibility or long-term planning? Obviously, we have fiscal challenges we need to address, but we also have economic challenges we need to address and a lot of jobs in the private sector that are leaving the territory with the closure of the mines and not a lot to replace them. So the good stuff about this is, again, the times nine multiplier for every dollar we put into this but also the sustainable jobs it creates as long as the funding's there. It is very much a "if you fund it, they will come" kind of model.

So as we try to pivot into a future, an increasingly uncertain future, is a more robust film rebate program, that can attract larger productions, support more local productions, and grow a film industry in -- I mean, in the hub communities, part of the department's long-term thinking? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Well, Mr. Chair, I'm not shy to ask for money; that's for sure, and I'm sure my Cabinet colleagues would confirm that.

In my short time as Minister of ITI, we've managed to take this fund from \$100,000 to \$500,000 and now this year to \$1 million. And so we're seeing a continued significant amount of investment in it, acknowledging that the benefits are huge and not just for the North Slave region but for the whole territory.

Through a CanNor investment, we were able to work with a location scout who travelled the territory and actually created a bank of photographs and video of communities and areas across the territory. By the way, loves Frank Channel Bridge, does not want to see it replaced, but -- had to let him down gently.

But my point, Mr. Chair, is that this really is a great opportunity for the territory, and I just want to thank my Cabinet colleagues for the support in increasing this fund to an entire million dollars. We will continue to, of course, track the success of this program. And I'm glad that the Member brought up the film sets that he's had the opportunity to be on as well. And we continue to see those in the territory. They continue to make the North a destination for the world, and we'll continue to grow that fund as best we can and we'll continue to capitalize on our small fund as best as we can. But a million dollars is a big deal as well. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you for that. I want to move on. But I will point out I have spoken to filmmakers who have left the territory because this funding's just not enough to continue to -- them to pursue their career in the industry. So there is a limit to how effective it is. But if it keeps growing, then, yeah, maybe we can take -- we can develop our own cottage industry like what they've done in -- or they did for a while -- it's different now but, like, in Saskatchewan, which isn't, you know, known for its robust film studios and things like that but they had a lot of activity just because of their rebate system.

Moving to just the general function -- I know it's always -- it's easier to follow the line items, but going to the trade part of this activity, obviously trade is what we're talking about almost every day incessantly, relentlessly. Do we have sufficient resources in our trade -- in the trade function of this department to manage the, you know, increasingly complicated trade files that are coming forward, whether it's interprovincial trade or the tariff threat? My concern is if we're not sufficiently resourced, it might take a while to catch up with the changes that are happening rapidly across Canada and in the world. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Well, Mr. Chair, I can definitely say that the staff that work on trade within ITI have had an incredibly busy year. We currently sit -- the Northwest Territories is currently the chair on the committee of internal trade, and we've already had three meetings this year at a federal, territorial, provincial level, which I know is a lot of time for staff but I will say huge props to those staff. They are absolute rock stars. They have supported me every step of the way. They have done incredible work not only on

behalf of the Northwest Territories but on behalf of Canadians.

We do have experience and expertise within that field. One of the staff that I have had the opportunity to work very closely on that has worked within the file for a decade, and she's incredible. She is incredibly good at her job.

We also work quite closely with Department of Justice and have the honour and privilege of having one of the lawyers who actually negotiated the Canadian Free Trade Agreement on behalf of the Northwest Territories who supports our team. And I do feel that that team is, although very busy, very well supported and they, I'm sure, will continue to be rock stars on support -- or in support of the people of the territory for this very difficult time for Canadians but also they are rising to the challenge. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. And it's always nice to recognize the good work of staff, so I appreciate the Minister's very kind words for public servants.

That being said, are these -- well, not that being said, there's no but here; they're great, thank you. Period. It would be a shame if this was -- because I know in the past, trade has been less significant, and it's been off the corner of someone else's desk. So is this a dedicated kind of trade unit that's doing this work, or is this something that they have to manage on top of other competing priorities? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: The short answer, yes, this is something that is on top of their other duties for sure. But the other side of this is because we are currently the national chair for committee on internal trade, we are also able to pull on the CIT budget in order to -- we're not expected to fund these additional meetings, which I think is a positive for the territory.

The other piece of this is this was also the area where immigration used to sit within the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment, and that portion has now been pulled over to ECE, so it does narrow their focus somewhat. And I can say they certainly are very focused right now on trade and investment. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. And that's comforting to know. I wish them well as they continue to navigate the daily grenades that get chucked into the trade landscape seemingly. It's not easy to keep up for anyone, and I can't imagine it's an easy job for them. So thank you for their service, Mr. Chair.

Turning to fisheries in the time I have left, there's been a lot of effort, I know, from the department to grow a North Slave -- or the North Slave side of the fishery business. Hay River has, you know, a long tradition of commercial fishery and successful fishers over time. I've had the privilege to speak to many of them, and I don't want to get into their disagreements with the department on this one; rather, I'd like to know what the plan is to expand the North Slave fishery. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, industry, tourism and investment does have a robust program to support people who want to get into fishing in the Northwest Territories, that they are able to support with equipment that people might need. And then in addition to that, education, culture and employment also does have a wage subsidy program if fishers are wanting to hire deck hands, and so there's a training component there as well and able to kind of do some succession planning for future fishers. Industry, tourism and investment has also been investing in a winter fishery to make it more of a year-round sector as well and because traditionally it has been looked at as more of a summertime program. And then in addition to that, ITI also provides incentives to fishers who are doing kind of the most catch throughout the territory. And currently, for this year, we're looking at different options and programs for the by-products of fish in the territory. So an example of that is fertilizer, for example, using fish by-product as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So first I just wanted to say that I am actually quite pleased overall with the ITI budget, and I find that in this budget there are some of the more hopeful and shining lights of us making concerted new efforts to achieve the priorities in our mandate. You know, one example of course, being the increases to the film industry rebate program. So I just wanted to commend the Minister and her staff for that.

One question I wanted to ask first, and this is based on page 24 of the business plan. So one of the goals that the department has set for itself is to promote and support mentorship and capacity building programs in all non-extractive sectors, and there's notes there around that there's been 49 participants so far. But I wondered if the Minister could explain what kinds of programs or sectors these participants have been receiving mentorship and capacity building in so we have a better picture. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would love to pass to assistant deputy minister Cyr.

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

MS. MELISSA CYR: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So with regards to the mentorships, we work very close in partnership with the -- for example, the NWT Tourism. We have NorthernMost Host mentorship programs that are hosted in all our various communities and regions. There's also a hide and fur through our hide and fur program for trappers in collaboration with ECC as well as a number of other ones with -- in the arts, having workshops with artists, whether it's with seal or other products. So that would encompass the 49 that we do have hosted in the last year throughout the five regions.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you for that. I think it's good to get the word out about these opportunities.

I have a question on commercial fisheries, and this relates to the revenue summary also back on page 230 but, you know, we're continuing to support our commercial fisheries, and we had predicted in 2024-2025 that revenues from fish sales were going to increase from \$1.2 million to \$1.6 million but last year the actual sort of revenues ended up being more like \$1.2 million, and now we're predicting again for this coming year still at \$1.2 million.

Can the Minister explain what was the hope in terms of expected revenues last year to \$1.6 million, and have we given up on whatever that hope is given that we're back to the same expectation for this year, or what's the plan going forward to try to increase revenues on fish sales? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, certainly last year we had some unexpected things happen. First of all, we had an evacuation at the end of the summer where 70 percent of the territory was evacuated and right around Great Slave Lake. The other part of that is we had significantly low water and so the fishers had a really hard time getting their boats into the water and waited them out for a bit and then ended up actually bringing their boats, some of them, over to Yellowknife to get them into the water or to other launch points because Hay River was just too low for them to get them into the water on that side. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I guess the question is so for this coming here, we're still predicting \$1.2 million in revenues which was sort of what it was before. I understand there was many disruptions last year and the year before. Are we predicting, though, that revenues will increase or are we actively taking steps to try to make it increase, you know, barring further disasters and evacuations and plagues and all the rest? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Absolutely, the goal is to see the fish plant generate more and more revenue every year like a business. It is not the GNWT's intention to forever operate and own a fish plant. So what we really want to do is to be able to show that it's profitable and show what it can do. Currently, it is being operated by FFMC and so we work with them in order to understand what the forecast will be, but our goal is to look at some of those byproduct offshoots, make sure that we're encouraging and supporting fishers to get out on the lake, making sure that people are aware of these programs, and making sure that we're continuing to grow the sector and grow the industry. I think that, especially with the conversations that are happening right now across the country about buying Canadian, there's definitely always new opportunities to do some more internal trade and then also opportunities as well that lead us into other international markets too. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So it sounds like we are hopeful that we will exceed

our revenue estimates or expectations for this year. I do hope to see that and certainly open to future conversations if we're encountering continuing challenges and barriers on how we can keep improving our fishing sector, which is very important.

I wanted to turn now to another one of ITI's goals in the business plan is to ensure there can be a transfer of skills from mine closure into new areas, and this is specifically listed under the housing priority. So I would interpret that to mean that the intention is to ensure that workers who might be transitioning away from a job with a mine that's closing could then work somehow in the housing sector. Can the Minister explain what the department is doing to try to make that happen or how she sees that pathway working for workers who might be losing their jobs at mines that are closing. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we're working closely with Diavik. Diavik has their My Path program where they identify, you know, who the worker is, what their skill set is, and what their intentions post closure are. So some people intend to retire. Some people intend to start their own business. I had the opportunity to sit with a Member from the South Slave -- sorry, with a resident from the South Slave who currently works at Diavik and is in the process of putting their ducks in a row to get their own business started. And some of them intend to stay with Rio Tinto proper and look at new opportunities. But there are some people who are wanting to return to their home community and are not ready for retirement. And so the intent there is to ensure that we don't lose any skilled workers, and if somebody is returning to their home community and is, per se, an electrician or has gained experience as a heavy duty mechanic or whatever their skill set may be, we certainly don't want to lose their skill set or lose them from their home community. And so certainly trying to ensure that we are aligned with Diavik, that if there are people in that situation that we can ensure that we're connecting them with other opportunities in their home community. I know that in conversation with Housing NWT that at times they are missing some of the trades people that they need in order to do maintenance of their units and their infrastructure. So ensuring that we're connecting with people -- connecting people with opportunity is key. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So my final question, for Prosper NWT I understand that we are transferring \$1.5 million aroundabouts to them, but I also see that in their, you know, statement as information item, they're carrying an accumulative surplus each year of over \$35 million. And so I wonder if the Minister can explain why they're not -- why they need to maintain a surplus of \$35 million and why they can't use some of the surplus to fund, you know, what the GNWT is currently funding, you know, each year to the tune of \$1.5 million. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And, Mr. Chair, I cannot explain to you how much I'm wishing that Prosper NWT was still sitting next to me. But, Mr. Chair -- and I'm going to very uneloquently describe this, but essentially those are their investments into loans, and so it's not cold hard cash, so to say, sitting there in their bank accounts not doing anything. Their role is to continuously invest dollars in northern businesses and to grow those businesses. And so it's not a bank account with \$35 million sitting there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank for that explanation. Nothing further. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. Community futures for this fiscal year, I know it's to help business development or corporation, that's what it says. So do you think that's enough, or it's -- I think it -- well, for me, I don't think that's enough. So I just wanted to ask the Minister if there's going to be -- with everything that's happening in the Northwest Territories with the mine -- you know, with the diamond mines winding down and now we're going over to the Giant Mine remediations, so I know there's going to be a lot of those activities happening, and I'm sure there's other development corporation that might want to, you know -- for their own businesses, might want to pursue that. But this community futures program that I see here in the budget, it's not enough. I don't think it's enough. So is there going to be an increase in this budget?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we've got the SEED funding program, which is a grant program and affords grants to people who are looking to invest in business ventures through ITI. We also have community futures. Now, community futures is a loan type program. And then in -- outside of ITI and Prosper NWT, which is now arm's length, we also have a loan type program there, and they also do have some grants. Like, for example, their digital investment piece is through grants. So there isn't an intent in this budget to increase the amount going to community futures, but all that to say there are different options depending on what people are looking to do. And then the other piece that I think is really crucial here is we are in the middle of doing a review of our community futures program because as I laid out, there are different programs, and there are some programs that have overlap and then my concern is potentially gaps in some spaces, and if as far as -- as not just the funding that's provided but also the supports that are provided. So we're doing a review of our community futures program, and that will give us also some recommendations as to how to improve the program like the Member is speaking to.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, thank you. If the Minister can elaborate. Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, if she can elaborate a little bit on that. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So that's the -- that we call -- so the SCAP funding is agriculture funding. It was afforded to ITI by the federal government, and that funding is for different agriculture projects across the territory on an application base. It is very well tapped into. I believe by October, it was already 75, 76 percent allocated for the year, so it is a very popular program in the territory. And some people end up using it for equipment. Some people, I believe, use it for mentorship opportunity -- or training, rather. And so it has a fairly diverse range of what people can use it for. It's also been used for community gardens as well. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, thank you. Yes, that's about it for this section. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Is there any further questions from Members? Okay, seeing no further questions, please turn to page 238.

Industry, tourism and investment, economic diversification and business support, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$20,435,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Committee, we'll take a five minute break and we'll continue on.

---SHORT RECESS.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, committee, we will continue on. Please grab your seats. Thank you.

Moving on to minerals and petroleum resources. Order. You're here for the boss. Thank you.

Moving on to minerals and petroleum resources beginning on page 243 with information items on page 246. Are there any questions? No further questions, please turn to page 244.

Industry, tourism and investment, minerals and petroleum resources, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$16,751,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to tourism and parks beginning on page 247 with information items on page 251. Are there any questions? No further questions, please turn to page 248. Industry, tourism and investment, tourism and parks, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 -- I'm sorry, okay, I'm sorry. Did I -- I didn't see your hand. Do you have a question going back to -- parks on page 251? I was just on a roll. Okay, go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm so sorry, and I thought I was from Frame Lake for a second.

Anyway, I know at some point in the business plan -- I am sorry, I do not have the page in front of me -- that under the tourism and parks activity, we speak about public safety and the fact that there are a high number of incidents here -- thank you to myself for finding it -- 131 incidents have been reported in parks in the

NWT since April 2024. So I'd say probably about an eight-month period before these business plans updates were printed. That is an increase of 76 incidents from 2023. Can the Minister speak a little bit to the root causes of why we're having so many issues with public safety in parks. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we had a number of communities evacuated and the -- our parks ended up being used as evacuation spots and ended up seeing a significant increase in incidents in our parks in the territory. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So it sounds, then, that this particular measure and target might resolve itself if, you know, all deities willing we don't have any evacuations this year. So is there -- is there any kind of plan here; what kind of approach is the department taking? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So what was done was we worked with communities to hire security for the parks in order to further support park users that were there because of the evacuation. So we will continue working with MACA and with Indigenous governments should the need arise. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And just generally speaking, in the Yellowknife area there are lots of folks throughout all of the Yellowknife ridings who use Fred Henne, use parks along the Ingraham Trail. Is there a notable increase of incidents outside of evacuation? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: No, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's really good to hear, and I appreciate that. I just know that when I was young, and when the Minister was young, and I'm sure we both did quite a -- a bunch of partying at the wonderful territorial

parks, so. Even though she might not want me to talk about that. But, you know, making sure everybody is safe and enjoying those spaces is really important to me and our residents, so thanks for that. I'll leave it there.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Any other Members that have questions? Member from the Deh Cho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: On parks, thank you, Mr. Chair. How is the department better promoting parks for residents outside of the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. We have an excellent relationship with Tourism NWT who does wonderful work. We also have -- sorry, and I should toot their horn a little bit. They've done a tremendous amount of work promoting even on things like Good Morning America. And as soon as they have done that work, we've seen access to our tourism operators shoot through the roof and some of those people, of course, are using our parks. We also have a tremendous amount of marketing on social media. We also have information in visitors centres in other jurisdictions. And a great way to also promote it is to ensure that people are having a great experience when they travel to the territory and they tell their friends. Thank you.

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

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Community -- visitor information centres, are communities encouraged to open up those up or do they just make the request themselves to ITI to get a visitor information centre in their communities? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, it's certainly up to the community, and we're always happy to lend some suggestions and some expertise from our staff, and we can certainly support through a contribution agreement. But ultimately it is up to the community. Thank you.

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

MRS. YAKELEYA: So it's up to the community. Is that through the hamlet office or the IG, or who makes the request from the -- at the community level? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I would say that it could be different from different communities. But certainly, you would want to ensure that the community is aligned in that request and ultimately working together because then you have certainly a better product at the end of the day if you have community support for it. Thank you.

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

MRS. YAKELEYA: If one were to open in, let's say, the Deh Cho going between Enterprise and Fort Providence, somewhere in between there, what support is provided to open up a visitor information centre? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we can certainly help in the form of a business plan to ensure that all options are considered and that, you know, there's a robust plan that goes with it. I know that in the Member's area, there is incredible areas to go and visit. There's incredible artists. I know when I am in the region and I'm -- I get to see some earrings and stuff, I always wish I could buy them all, and so I think something like that would be incredibly successful. And so I would certainly say that having a conversation with the regional office and there can be conversations about stacking funding, say with CanNor, and certainly the region has the traffic along the road, so I think there's some great opportunities for some business ventures over there. Thank you.

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

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's it for me. I just wanted to make sure that if we could, we could get one maybe around Big River or somewhere along the way where local artisans, too, can display their stuff and people can get information about the good things that are happening in the Deh Cho. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Is there any further questions from Members on this one? Seeing none, no further questions, please turn to page 248.

Industry, tourism and investment, tourism and parks, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$18,575,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. There are additional information items on page 252 to 256. Are there any questions? Seeing none. Thank you, Members. Please return to the department summary found on page 229 and revenue summary information items on page 230. Are there any questions? Yellowknife North member.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have to be really quick.

Okay, so I see in the revenue summary under minerals, oil and gas royalties, you know, last year we ended up getting \$1.6 million and this coming year we're expecting \$1.7 million. But then I look at how much we're spending under minerals and petroleum resources on diamonds, royalties and financial analysis, and that's \$4.3 million. I do understand from ITI's previous information that we have a diamond valuator contract to value the diamonds that has been increasing this year and we're up to \$2.7 million just for the valuator contract this year. Can the Minister explain how it makes financial sense to spend \$2.7 million to value diamonds that we're only getting \$1.7 million on royalties from? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Well, first of all, I would have to say that I'm legislatively required to have diamonds valued in the territory. And the perks of diamonds or the revenue from diamonds is certainly greater than what it is seen here under the revenue summary. So, you know, example, we have hundreds -- well, over -- we've got thousands of Northerners working at our diamond mines, and Diavik alone for example, is 1200. And in addition to the people that are working at the mine and the benefits of that, or working for the mine, there's also all of the contract opportunities that exist as well.

The way that our royalty system works in the territory is it is a revenue-based royalty system which means that if mines are investing in the territory, that is deducted from their royalties so that they're able to apply that to the royalties that they're paying to the Northwest Territories. Diamond markets right now are certainly not where we'd like to see them be. They continue to go down, they continue to struggle, and that is for geopolitical reasons around the world. We're not the only jurisdiction that is struggling as far as diamond mining. But ultimately I am -- I'm legislated to ensure that our diamonds

are valued, and that is something that is done consistently through all of our diamond mines.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do certainly understand that there are many other kinds of benefits that come from diamond mines besides royalties themselves. I wonder if -- I just -- the contrast in the numbers is quite stark though, in terms of the amount of money required apparently to, you know, verify or value something versus the royalties coming from that product. Are there any ways that the Minister has explored to try to find cost efficiencies or savings? Is there a, you know, less fancy version of diamond valuation? I'm not sure, I don't understand much about this area of work but are there different, you know, levels of service that are available that could help us sort of scale to, you know, the level that we're dealing with here given the amount of royalties we're getting? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So we're certainly always making sure that we're getting the best bang for our buck. This was an RFP that was recently awarded, and so certainly still going through that process on a regular basis and so this contract was recently awarded and went through our procurement processes.

It's worth noting, too, that over the -- this is certainly not the norm. You know, our royalties over the last ten years have looked as wonderful as \$62 million and then, unfortunately, this year it's far lower. I certainly hope that diamond commodities will turn around but that's not something that is predicted in the next little while here. But we certainly are constantly looking forward to making sure that we are getting the best bang for our buck. And ultimately -- and I've lost my train of thought there.

Yes, the answer to the Member's question is yes, we are always looking to get the biggest bang for our buck. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess my final question on that is is there much competition in this sector of diamond valuers? Do we have, you know, various firms that are bidding on this kind of a contract, or are we kind

of stuck with just one option in this case? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, it's a very specialized expertise. These are people who, you know, look at -- they're very skilled at their work, and they travel far and wide to come to the North to do this work. And so certainly when we put out RFPs, we're looking at multiple companies. Unfortunately, like many businesses, our costs do keep going up.

We have had requests from diamond mines to increase their valuations. And what that ends up doing is increasing ultimately their paydays in order to make sure that they continue working on their cash flow at a difficult time for diamond mines. And what we've said to them in this case is that we will certainly ensure that we are making the process available but we as a government won't absorb the costs of that. And it's one where even though it is -- this is difficult because this is the year that we're looking at, it's really important that we don't look at this cost in isolation because it's largely the same cost with some forced growth year over year over year. The industry has kind of a set range of where they fall in this kind of cost market and what this role demands, as far as like what funding it calls for, but it's really important that we consider the revenues over the lifespan when that contract is over the lifespan as well. And unfortunately, with commodities like this, there are amazing years, there are not-so-great years. And we're in a not-so-great year. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. All right. I'm going to go to the next Member on my list is the Member from Great Slave. My apologies. Okay, there's no further questions. Seeing none, seeing no further questions, committee, I will now call the departmental summary.

Industry, tourism and investment, operations expenditure summary, total department, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$66,004,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing before us. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses from the chambers.

Committee, what is the wish of the committee from the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake?

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

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. The motion's in order. The motion is non-debatable. All those in favour? All those opposed? Thank you. Motion carried.

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiliideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your committee has been considering Tabled Document 275-20(1) and, Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole will be concurred with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiliideh. Can I have a seconder? I'm going to pick on my friend from Hay River South today. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? None. Motion carried.

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

Orders of the Day

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Angus Wilson): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight will meet at rise of House.

Orders of the day for Tuesday, March 11th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer or Reflection
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
5. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
6. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
7. 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
8. Acknowledgements

9. Oral Questions

10. Written Questions

11. Returns to Written Questions

- Written Question 14-20(1), Operating Rooms at Stanton Territorial Hospital

12. Replies to the Commissioner's Address

13. Petitions

14. Tabling of Documents

15. Notices of Motion

16. Motions

17. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills

18. First Reading of Bills

- Bill 22, Legislation Act

19. Second Reading of Bills

20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

- Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates

21. Report of Committee of the Whole

22. Third Reading of Bills

23. Orders of the Day

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: You done good. Colleagues, this House stands adjourned until Tuesday, March 11th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 5:59 p.m.

