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UNEDITED HANSARD

Thursday, February 5, 2026

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The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker

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Send corrections to kate_covello@ntassembly.ca

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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UNEDITED HANSARD

YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Thursday, February 5, 2026

Members Present

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

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayer or Reflection

---Prayer or reflection

SPEAKER (HON. SHANE THOMPSON):
Please be seated. I'd like to thank Lillian Elias for the opening prayer, reflections. Budget address. Minister of Finance.

Budget Address

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, a strong Canada needs a strong North.

There is a growing recognition across this country of the tremendous potential of the North from natural resources to water to distinctive arts and culture. This potential is not new. The people who live here see it every day. And yet successive governments, as well as residents and businesses, struggle to unlock this potential.

For too long, the North has been a fairytale for Canadian identity about snow and cold, dogsleds, and aurora. Fairytales are not real. The true story of the North lies with its people. The people who live here and know the vastness of Canada's northern landscape.

Meanwhile, as Northerners, we have been unable to overcome long known economic challenges including a historic lack of foundational infrastructure that contributes to high costs and holds back efficient construction of necessities like housing. Instead of networks of transportation and energy systems, we see these built in piecemeal increments. Sporadic development incentivizes protectionism as we each hold tight to the few big opportunities that seem to come along. This is inefficient, stifles innovation and keeps our collective opportunities from growing. This need not be our future.

Today's shifting and uncertain international landscape has forced Canada to look to its northern border with urgency. Assumptions that shaped the modern Canadian state are being challenged. External threats to our economy, sovereignty, and our values are growing. These

global headwinds are blowing away old narratives of how this country allocates resources and understands nation-building.

Canada's Arctic is vulnerable to foreign actors moving into the region with impunity. Canada has recognized that it must strengthen its Arctic presence with dual-use infrastructure and supply chain resilience to counter the increasing influence of hostile powers in the region. This government, and all partners in the Northwest Territories, stand ready to work with the federal government to unlock our potential and strengthen Canada as a circumpolar country.

We must ensure that as the eyes of our nation look north, they do not see a fairytale but a living, thriving homeland where people already tell their own story with strength, honesty and pride.

Sovereignty must be expressed through people.

Our government cannot tell the stories of the people of the North or unlock the opportunities of this territory alone. Partnerships will be key to our future. This territory will be at its strongest when all governments, all leaders within the Northwest Territories, can marshal our voices and resources to seize upon these winds of change. Our collective willingness to share our stories, form partnerships, and work together will spread a strong story about the North.

Fortunately, partnerships across the territory are already adding to the momentum of change. For two autumns in a row, the NWT Council of Leaders traveled together to Ottawa to speak with one voice to the federal government. In addition, there are memorandums of understanding for collaboration now signed and collaboration underway to advance projects across the territory. These kinds of agreements reaffirm the core principles of our relationships and set out practical ways for us to work together.

Mr. Speaker, the message is clear: A strong Northwest Territories builds a stronger Canada. The momentum is in swing, the partnerships are forming, and the opportunities are knocking. This budget positions us not just to

react to change, but to help shape it by supporting the people and communities who are the story of the North and who must be at the centre of every opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2026 will continue to deliver on this government's priorities for affordable housing, a strong economic foundation, access to health care and safe residents and communities.

Like other governments in Canada, the GNWT is facing revenue volatility and economic uncertainty. The Northwest Territories has the added reality of a private sector economy dominated by a single mineral resource for the last twenty years but with one of those remaining diamond mines beginning its planned closure this year. Meanwhile, market forces are driving operating costs up and pushing demand for diamonds down, which affects the economics of the other two mines. Additionally, Imperial Oil's decision to cease operations in the Sahtu will have further negative economic consequences.

[Translation] **INSERT*** [Translation Ends]

The resident labour force remains strong overall, including skilled and capable workers. The territory's population has shown its largest growth in several cycles, although a smaller share of the population is actively employed. Public and private sector employment has remained steady despite wider economic challenges. Workers in the Northwest Territories continue to earn more than the Canadian average, and wage growth remains positive, particularly in the public and services sectors.

The strategic, geopolitical role of the North cannot be overstated. To be a circumpolar nation, Canada must invest in the North: in foundational, enabling infrastructure, in defence capabilities and dual use capacities, and in the people. While the underlying impetus might be a bit grim, the opportunities this creates can bring positive contributions to our communities.

We are seeing growth in smaller economic sectors that make a disproportionate contribution to employment, particularly in small communities. Tourism is rebounding since the COVID pandemic as is the fishing sector. The higher fur prices are also encouraging. Our film and video sector has almost doubled in value since 2020. Each of these areas has further opportunity and room for growth.

Exploration spending appears to be shifting to deposit appraisals, meaning that projects are progressing from exploration towards production. This is happening not only for

critical minerals, but also for base and precious metals.

Inflation has eased from previous highs, helping to stabilize household purchasing power, which in turn has boosted retail sales.

Business activity has shown a modest increase in the number of active enterprises although levels remain below pre-pandemic norms.

The structural challenges that weigh on our economy weigh also on our ability to raise revenues as a government. This in turn limits the GNWT's fiscal capacity and flexibility to deliver programs and services or make infrastructure investments. Our budgets have delivered stability, but we continue to face a lack of any economies of scale.

Limited fiscal capacity does not eliminate the responsibility of the GNWT to take action to meet the moment we find ourselves in. We have a responsibility to articulate the challenges we face and identify changes within our control. Given the challenges faced by Canada and across the North, it will be critical that the leadership of this territory and Canada pull together. Together we build momentum and together we have more power to seize opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, the increasing expenditure pressures to maintain service levels across the territory make fiscal management challenging. With limited options for significant revenue growth, fiscal discipline must remain a priority. Even in a climate of continuing external cost escalations, particularly for health services and transportation, we have held expenditure increases to less than 1 percent, just \$22 million, from last year's budget.

We have shifted the focus of this budget away from trimming down towards improvements in service delivery and through the reallocation of existing resources to areas of highest need.

Over the course of this Assembly, we have reduced the number of active positions by half a percent across departments and agencies. Only in critical areas of need, as reflected in the priorities of this Assembly, are we seeing notable position growth, namely within housing and health care.

In this budget, we are proposing to realign resources through a review of long-standing vacancies, which are roles that have not been actively staffed for some time. This approach allows us to make thoughtful adjustments with minimal impact on current employees while responsibly redirecting \$3.8 million to higher priority areas. Where adjustments may affect positions, we remain committed to our public

servants and guided by our staff retention policy, and we will work to keep employees within the public service.

Through all of these efforts, operating spending remains below total revenues. Capital projects in the 2026-2027 Capital Budget will therefore advance using the available operating surplus. Operating surpluses only ever pay a portion of the capital expenses in a given year and there are, therefore, short-term borrowing needs that arise as part of our overall fiscal management. As such, our total debt will increase but remains within the debt management guidelines of the fiscal responsibility policy.

We continue to monitor fiscal risks and opportunities. As outlined in the borrowing plan, we are recommending shifting a portion of short-term debt to long-term instruments. This will reduce exposure to market fluctuations and helps keep debt affordable and predictable.

Budget 2026 also proposes to increase the supplementary reserve to \$210 million, providing a more transparent operating surplus projection. This higher value better reflects the trend of the last several years of emergencies, cost pressures, and emerging needs. Allocating this sum upfront gives a clearer picture of where we expect to end the fiscal year; however, our focus remains on careful management to avoid drawing on the reserve wherever possible. With that change, we are also increasing the required threshold for departments when requesting supplementary funding.

Our work towards government efficiency includes ongoing efforts to strengthen the long-term sustainability of the healthcare system, recognizing its critical importance to residents and its significant impact on GNWT expenditures. It should be no surprise that healthcare costs continue to take up the greatest share of the overall operating budget. The healthcare system is large and complex with cost pressures driven by contractual obligations, rising service costs, and the need to maintain high standards of care. Through the collaborative efforts of the Department of Health and Social Services, the healthcare system sustainability unit and the public administrator of the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority, we will act on these barriers and contain these pressures.

As part of this work, we are proposing \$486,000 to launch a two-year pilot for medical travel case management. This project will establish three nurse case manager positions to provide dedicated case management with the goal to reduce avoidable medical travel costs. As well, because the program is expected to reduce

patients being sent out of territory unnecessarily and improve the use of virtual patient, we expect to not only reduce costs but significantly improve the patient experience.

Other areas of effort for continual improvements and better efficiency include a proposal to provide the Department of Infrastructure with \$828,000 to consolidate and oversee management of our vehicle fleet. As well, we propose to establish two positions in the Department of Finance to conduct workplace investigations and deliver harassment training to staff, which is a savings over the existing use of contracted services. We are currently working with other governments in Canada towards bulk purchase and economies of scale discounts, such as technology services product licensing. And, further, we are proposing \$338,000 to streamline our information technology procurement and implement the GNWT's vendor performance management policy, which also helps support the GNWT's private sector contractors.

The priorities of the 20th Assembly remain guideposts that ensure our public resources meet the expectations of those we represent. Achieving these priorities will help the Northwest Territories meet the moment that we are in.

We are proposing \$2.4 billion in departmental spending in 2026-2027, including \$99 million for enhancements to existing programs and services. We are proposing \$38 million in initiatives and other adjustments, the majority of which are supported by federal funding. Reductions and expiring programs reduce the overall proposed spending to just \$22 million.

The Assembly's priorities put reconciliation at the forefront and will be best achieved through collaboration with other governments and other public and private sector institutions.

Following the guidance of the We Always Remember Circle, we propose \$675,000 to commission and install a public monument honouring residential schools survivors and those who were lost to their families and communities. This project is a survivor-led initiative - a unique collaboration between survivors and the Government of the Northwest Territories and fulfills number 82 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

We are also proposing \$200,000 to advance negotiations for land and self-government agreements within the Northwest Territories.

Through the working group between the Northwest Territories Council of Leaders and the Department of Health and Social Services,

the GNWT is ensuring community and Indigenous government involvement in healthcare decisions. Further, Community Wellness Plans offer financial flexibility for greater autonomy. Led by Indigenous governments, the mental wellness and addictions recovery fund increases access to culturally-based healing close to home.

We are working with Indigenous governments on a new strategic approach to Indigenous language revitalization. We are proposing \$519,000 to address recruitment and retention challenges for junior kindergarten to Grade 12 Indigenous language instructors and to enhance support for Indigenous language instruction across the territory. As well, we propose \$68,000 to enable the official languages board to fulfill its mandate under the Official Languages Act.

In addition, the mentor-apprentice program is now open. The program pairs a fluent Indigenous language speaker with a learner so that the apprentice can have the opportunity to live life in the language.

We are proposing \$350,000 to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Implementation Act action plan. This will help track progress and support the growth and development of action items.

Much of Canada continues to see high demand across the spectrum of housing needs. A lack of safe housing impacts the availability of labour, can cause a reduction in people's wellness, and increase community insecurity. We are taking steps across the housing spectrum through partnerships with communities and the non-profit sector.

The GNWT is expanding its support for housing-related infrastructure following the \$74 million Canada Housing Infrastructure Funding Agreement by launching an open call for applications for priority projects planned for 2026 and 2027.

Housing NWT is at the forefront of housing innovation, working with the modular construction sector, and incubating a hybrid method for construction that supports local development and training opportunities. The agency is currently completing a demonstration project in Deline.

We are proposing \$4 million to be shared between health and social services and executive and indigenous affairs to support transitional and supportive housing and family violence prevention programs administered by the non-profit sector.

In addition, through Housing NWT we are proposing to provide \$8.3 million to more than triple the budgets for emergency shelters in Yellowknife, Hay River, Inuvik, and Fort Smith, and have added more resources for a new division within the agency to address homelessness. We are also re-profiling resources and increasing the budget for the Yellowknife Day Shelter and Sobering Centre by a net \$460,000 to ensure a more realistic budget going forward.

When I delivered the budget address one year ago, an attack on Canada's economy by our closest trading partner had only just begun. Since then, the foundations of international trade continue to be eroded with no semblance of rational predictability. While the Northwest Territories is not a major exporter, our economy is tied to that of Canada, and our principal export is tied to global economic stability. Even so, we can support growth in our economy by removing the barriers that have long been a drag on the opportunities that exist across the Northwest Territories. Success will take effort not only by the GNWT but from partnership across the Northwest Territories.

The mineral resource sector continues to be a foundation for private sector activity, especially in transportation, wholesale trade, and construction. The GNWT is providing support to our diamond industry by increasing diamond valuations to move more product to markets, extending property tax relief, and providing support for Burgundy's successful federal tariff relief loan.

We are proposing \$150,000 to support Indigenous participation in the resource sector by developing expertise in training, workshops, and networking. Empowering Indigenous communities to engage effectively will make regulatory proceedings more effective and timely.

Development of the Mineral Resources Act regulations are an example of GNWT collaboration with Indigenous governments through the Intergovernmental Council and through technical working groups with those outside the council. To advance responsible resource development with oversight developed within the territory, we are proposing \$400,000 for the transition activities needed to bring the Act into force.

[Translation] **INSERT¹** [Translation Ends]

We also must take a long-term view for our residents and support their future opportunities and prosperity.

The GNWT invests over \$10 million in the junior kindergarten to Grade 12 education system and

consistently spends the most per student in Canada. We will continue to roll out the territorial adapted competency curriculum from British Columbia. Efforts in this space have already seen an increase of 6 percent in small community graduation rates this Assembly.

Last fall, we launched the temporary interim support assistants initiative to maintain educational supports. We will continue collaboration with the federal government to expand the healthy food for learning program and continue to advocate for the return of federal support for Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First.

Greater economic diversity is a shield against downturns in individual sectors or commodities. Diversity can also reflect the individual strengths of our communities or regions around the Northwest Territories. Our efforts to stimulate the development of different sectors of the economy is led by the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment.

Our freshwater fish industry has vast untapped potential. To continue growth in the commercial fishery sector, we are proposing \$2.9 million to support the Hay River Fish Plant. The plant is generating revenue but today's market prices for certain species of fish are low and inconnu sales to Russia were halted. However, the industry continues to establish itself, and we have seen the number of fishers increasing and their catch volumes growing. By the end of 2026, we expect to be fully certified by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and ready to take this industry directly to the international market.

Tourism also continues to see growth and holds the potential for so much more. We are proposing an additional \$335,000 to support the GNWT's Tourism 2030: Sustainable Journeys Ahead strategic plan to make the territory a premiere destination for visitors from around the world. We are also proposing \$474,000 to address increased costs in park contracts and utilities, ensuring our parks remain accessible and well maintained.

Tourism is a prime example of where success will depend on the private sector stepping up with innovative products to showcase the territory's abundance of spectacular nature and rich culture.

This spectacular backdrop has also led to growth in the film industry. We are proposing \$345,000 to support the industry with permanent funding for the film officer at the Northwest Territories Film Commission and to restore the producers incentive program. These

investments will help attract and leverage more dollars into the territory than what they cost.

One key requirement for economic activity, including housing construction and community development, is land. While still investing to support outstanding negotiations with Indigenous governments, we are also proposing \$367,000 for the Department of Environment and Climate Change to accelerate our responsiveness to requests for the transfer of land tenure.

Relying on internal collaboration, the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment will lead an initiative that will see reductions in existing GNWT regulatory processes, while executive and Indigenous affairs will lead an oversight policy to limit growth of new regulations. Municipal and community affairs will advance an initiative to explore an expanded set of regulated gaming options that better protects consumers from unregulated operators with a proposed \$300,000.

Healthy people and healthy communities are a positive expression of sovereignty within the Northwest Territories and a critical foundation for prosperity by ensuring labour availability, enabling entrepreneurship, and ensuring communities can maintain a sustainable business ecosystem.

As the work to improve the operational efficiency of the healthcare system progresses, we are introducing measures aimed at right-sizing budgets and improving prevention and timely care to reduce financial pressure caused by higher needs later on.

The Liwegoati Building is an important component of the health campus in Yellowknife, providing primary care, outpatient rehabilitation, and long-term and extended care beds. After monitoring the traffic seen in the first year of the building's operations, we are proposing \$1.7 million to establish eight new full-time equivalent positions to support the long-term and extended care beds and increase the capacity of the central reception area.

We are transitioning to a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week model for laboratory and diagnostic services at Stanton Territorial Hospital through a proposed \$3.1 million investment. An evaluation shows that the current model is not sustainable for patients or staff. Demand has resulted in increased workloads and lengthened wait times, which are being addressed through costly emergency callbacks. The proposed investment will allow a change to the new 24/7 model with 21 new

full-time positions to process tests and imaging faster and reduce the burden on staff and reliance on out-of-territory lab facilities.

We want to ensure the 8-1-1 health advice line remains available as it provides a vital resource for residents everywhere in the territory seeking immediate, valuable, credible and accessible health information and guidance and reduces pressure on frontline providers. We are proposing \$740,000 in part to help manage increasing call volumes but also to fill a void left by cancelled federal funding.

Outpatient intravenous therapy at Stanton Territorial Hospital plays an important role providing treatment in a controlled outpatient setting that reduces pressure on acute care services by helping to avoid hospitalizations and emergency visits. Additionally, it supports early discharge by allowing patients to continue receiving necessary intravenous medications or therapies without taking up an inpatient bed. Through Budget 2026, we propose \$549,000 to enhance this program.

We are proposing \$287,000 for a time-limited project management position to lead the recommended changes from the small community model and care review that will further improve service delivery in small communities caused by nursing staff shortages.

We will tackle the \$8 million shortfall in biomedical equipment essential for day-to-day healthcare operations in a systematic fashion. We are proposing an additional \$562,000 for renewing these assets through a consistent and phased multi-year replacement schedule.

We are facing rising costs across several key contracts that require \$1.9 million in proposed spending. This includes additional funding in Inuvik for adult residential care programs at the Charlotte Vehus Home and Billy Moore Group Home and service providers at the Inuvik Regional Hospital and funding for Avens, A Community for Seniors in Yellowknife. This funding will also address rising demand for, and increased costs of, blood products, increased costs for child and family services, legal contracts and legislated travel, and proper funding for essential health services program contracts.

Higher numbers of cancer patients and new treatments are increasing chemotherapy drug costs even with efforts to limit those costs through the health and social services department's product listing agreement with drug makers. As a result, we propose another \$215,000 in this budget to ensure sustainable funding for cancer treatments.

We are formalizing one full-time position under the Medical Assistance in Dying, or MAID, program with a proposed \$216,000 to ensure this service is available to patients.

We propose to meet all 32 recommendations from the security assessment at the Hay River Regional Health Centre through a \$589,000 investment. The security assessment revealed vulnerabilities in physical security, surveillance, access control, and emergency preparedness, many of which are directly related to illicit drug activity. Addressing these vulnerabilities will protect patients, staff and visitors, and the integrity of care delivery.

We are expanding the school funding framework through a proposed \$1.7 million to permanently support the school-based mental health and wellness program so that every child in every school across the Northwest Territories has access to a dedicated service provider. This builds on the success of the 2024-2025 pilot program that used schools as a conduit for mental health education, which produced increased student engagement and participation.

The Northwest Territories active living framework supports active wellness at all ages. Developed with territorial sport and recreation partners, we are in a phased expansion of this program to strengthen sport and recreation support across the territory through enhanced monitoring, improved data collection, and more coordinated funding practices. We propose \$2.8 million in this budget to establish stable funding for core territorial and regional sport and recreation partners.

Enhancing the safety of our residents and communities supports the long-term stability of the Northwest Territories.

Let me assure everyone the government remains firmly committed to addressing lead in our water systems. While the 2026-2027 Budget does not include additional resources, when required we will seek the resources to expand testing and act wherever and whenever it is needed.

[Translation] **INSERT*** [Translation Ends]

We are proposing to invest \$8 million in additional resources to improve emergency wildfire response and mitigate potential risks. This includes adding \$1.7 million to the Department of Environment and Climate Change for adaptation and preparedness training, flood hazards and biomass mapping, and wildland fire research. These supports complement the department's ongoing work to improve our response to wildfires, including planning for a longer wildfire season, more

training for firefighters, and higher aviation costs.

We will expedite final recovery efforts for the disaster events over the past four years with a proposed \$1.4 million to the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs to complete expense processing. This funding will improve supports for disaster-affected residents, support coordination with contractors to complete recovery work, and get through the paperwork needed to align with federal standards for assistance payments.

We are proposing \$790,000 to make improvements to the Northwest Territories emergency management system. This will advance a multi-year plan to address recommendations in the 2023 Emergency Response After-Action Review to strengthen community support, advance legislative reform, and enhance training and communications.

We are proposing \$519,000 to ensure the availability of paramedic services during community evacuations from wildfires to improve our ability to respond quickly and effectively in times of crisis and provide medical support to first responders. In addition to having trauma-informed personnel available for smaller communities in a crisis, paramedics are required to support responders during fire suppression efforts.

We are working to improve the relationship with community partners to support effective, territory-wide fire suppression. We propose an additional \$270,000 next year for territory-wide training support for community-level emergency services and firefighter education and development. This would help smaller communities meet national fire protection association standards with localized training materials and provide first aid and emergency medical responder training to their volunteers.

The GNWT's funding for community governments to support essential municipal services and infrastructure will increase by \$1.4 million to reflect continued inflationary pressures. The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs also uses its core funding to help community governments maximize their access to federal programs and funding.

Mr. Speaker, with this budget we will shift from restraint to readiness. We will focus on building partnerships and empowering our residents, communities, regions and partners to be ready to find, create, build and contribute to opportunities amidst uncertainty.

The Arctic and subarctic regions of the world are in the geopolitical cross hairs. This brings many risks that the Northwest Territories

cannot control and many opportunities that we do not have the financial or human resources to unlock on our own. Yet there is momentum around us that we must seize upon, not only as a government, but as a territory. The world will not wait for us, and so we must break down historic barriers and meet this moment to build the future of the territory. Together, we will build a more resilient, sustainable and prosperous Northwest Territories for generations to come.

All levels of government in the Northwest Territories working together will offer a stronger foundation of healthy, educated citizens living in safe and sustainable communities ready to capture opportunities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. We will take a short break.

--SHORT RECESS

MR. SPEAKER: Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Range Lake.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 819-20(1):
CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCATE

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, in the Northwest Territories, the child and family services system holds extraordinary power over children in care with no real independent oversight. Every choice made affects a child's life, but there's no formal review process. And since young children cannot advocate for themselves, they need someone to speak up on their behalf.

As MLAs, we are meant to serve as advocates when systems are failing Northerners yet even we are limited when it comes to child and family services cases. Because health and social services is the legal guardian of these children, it alone decides whether they receive an advocate, and all too often the answer is no. Biological and foster parents come to my office together seeking help, and I frequently cannot open a file with the Minister because that authority rests solely with her. This is a failure of oversight, plain and simple.

Children in care are treated almost as a class of constituents who are not allowed to represent themselves. When I am fortunate enough to get even a shred of information for families, the Minister responds with whatever is convenient for their office, often in canned and cryptic statements. If a foster family is struggling, they are reminded that CFS is focused on reunification which really means the foster family's concerns can be dismissed because they are temporary and replaceable. If a

biological family wants to be more involved, they are told there's a plan of care already in place and they must reach out on their own, which in practice means parents have no rights to look into these cases and raise concerns, and their MLAs are expected to step back.

Like all facets of government, child and family services needs oversight. The consequences of accountability are clear and have been represented in numerous findings of the auditor general. We are losing foster homes and we are adding trauma to everyone involved. Families who dedicate their life to caring for these children are all too often treated with suspicion meanwhile the system is not always succeeding in its most important goal - acting in the best interests of the children and youth in their care. If this Minister does not want every concern to become a political battle, then families must have someone they can turn to and speak up for them. The Northwest Territories desperately needs a child and youth advocate who is accountable to the families and reports independently to this House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 820-20(1):
ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION IN THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at the end of 2022 the Mackenzie gas project's permits quietly expired. In that moment, we could hear across the North's economy an exhale, a collective sigh of grief. I was there in the earliest days, Mr. Speaker. I remember the buzz, how exciting it was. It wasn't just talk about pipelines and gas; it was a talk about prosperity across the North. We were talking about the bedrock of our future. There was hope, and then there wasn't.

In my first term, we were warned that diamonds weren't forever, and we knew nonrenewable resources had a shelf life. Well, here we are staring down the barrel of an economic reckoning while the music is starting to the fade. And what is the response of the government, of this Assembly? Government always knows best. But now the budget in front of us, where are the jobs to stimulate the economy? Where is industry being invested in to spur excitement? Where is the economy front and center of this budget? Is there an economy, one might ask.

An outsider looking in told me recently, Mr. Speaker, that the government's economic plan isn't a strategy; it appears to them more of a

shelter in place policy. It took a page out of the safety manual. Nobody moves, nobody gets hurt.

Well, Northerners are hurting. The one taxpayer is wondering how they will ever survive. Cost of living is on the rise, hope is on the lows. Who will save us with this shrinking economy? But the demands keep rising. I had hopes if we dropped -- I had high hopes, Mr. Speaker, if we dropped the payroll tax it would have created a \$50 million economic stimulus in our northern economy, local spending and local shops paying bills, rewarding hard work. Zero appetite to consider those types of ideas. If we continue to wait for a miracle, Mr. Speaker, history will remember this Cabinet as one thing - an economic strategy for keeping the lights on. Well done.

We need to telegraph to industry and the world that we are open for business. We need to set the table for a diverse GDP. Think of Alberta. They're frustrated. They're landlocked with their resources. And I recall former Premier Bob McLeod's vision about send it north, some of those resources. And even Prime Minister Carney says multifaceted projects with multi benefits is good. Tap into the Alberta economic MOU, build the Mackenzie Valley Highway project, and tie in the Mackenzie gas pipeline. There's opportunities for everyone. Hear, hear, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 821-20(1):
MACKENZIE VALLEY HIGHWAY

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I spoke about the urgent need for the Mackenzie Valley Highway and the economic crisis facing the Sahtu and regions along the right of way. Today I want to speak about accountability, accountability to the mandate we committed to in this Assembly, and accountability to project campaign initiatives towards our federal colleagues.

The mandate of the 20th Assembly is clear. One of the core priorities is building a strong economic foundation. Within that priority, we committed to leveraging federal funding to close the infrastructure gap through investments in transportation, communication networks. Mr. Speaker, the Mackenzie Valley Highway is exactly this kind of critical infrastructure. Critical to project fruitions is Indigenous partnerships mentioned at the national level and at the territorial level. As I mentioned yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the modern treaties of the Gwich'in Tribal Council and the

Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated, in chapters 20 and 21, give rights on access to that specific chapter.

Mr. Speaker, this is a fundamental provision to form this project partnership. But, Mr. Speaker, before we can discuss project construction execution plans, leveraging federal funding is a prerequisite.

Mr. Speaker, this project is in immediate need to conclude or in immediate position to conclude phase two environmental assessment. We are further ahead in that area than we know. Consider this, Mr. Speaker: Compile, organize the 2013 data submitted by this government to the review board in partnership with the Indigenous government declaring that the EA is complete or could be complete in recognition of the old data for phase two. Mr. Speaker, later I will have questions for the appropriate Minister. Mahsi.

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

**MEMBER'S STATEMENT 822-20(1):
FINANCIAL SUPPORTS FOR SENIORS**

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have an aging population as we know. More people are retiring from many years of service in either the GNWT or other industries in the Northwest Territories. As our cost of living continues to rise, more of our retired seniors and elderly people are being forced to work part-time or make the difficult decision to move south where the cost of living is lower. We have programs such as seniors' home repairs or seniors' fuel subsidy, but the income thresholds of these programs often leave many seniors out in the cold. It is time we look at these policies, Mr. Speaker, evaluating if the income thresholds have been increasing with our cost of living. And, Mr. Speaker, to put a cultural lens on these policies as well. Many seniors in my region often have children or grandchildren depending on them. It would be good to see, Mr. Speaker, a cost analysis to see what the cost would be to this government if we were to double that threshold, an amount, so more seniors could qualify and what that cost would actually be.

I think the majority who are applying, but don't meet the criteria based on income, desperately need this assistance to ensure they can retire in the community where they have lived and worked all their lives, Mr. Speaker. I have several examples in my community that I could name, seniors coming to my office and, you know, requesting that we look at these policies. They struggle. They maintain their own home.

Oftentimes they have children or grandchildren living with them. And they just can't seem to get ahead or qualify for these policies, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to see us look at how we can increase that so that folks that really need it can get this funding to allow them to stay home and not have to leave our territory, Mr. Speaker. I know folks that are -- I don't believe that folks who can afford it apply for it, but I do think that we need to look seriously at how we increase these subsidies to allow people to take advantage of them. Thank you.

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

**MEMBER'S STATEMENT 823-20(1):
REFORMS TO INCOME SUPPORT
PROGRAMS**

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in March of last year, I tabled Alternatives North's proposal and policy summary towards a basic income guarantee in the Northwest Territories. There has been a lot of discussion in the 20th Assembly and previous Assemblies about the pitfalls and issues associated with income support. The 19th Assembly removed productive choices from the program, but now we are hearing from MLAs that this well-intentioned move is having negative consequences. It's deepening harmful cycles of dependency and disincentivizing people from working, preventing people from lifting themselves up and taking agency over their lives. For these reasons, I think it's important to think about how we could be doing things differently.

I want to be clear, Mr. Speaker, that I don't think there is a silver bullet to be found on these issues. No single solution is going to come to light that solves the complex problems which lead many people to rely on income support. We need a framework of approaches as diverse as the issues we are trying to solve. Education and skill development, creating employment opportunities, housing, health care, and support to keep people going when they fall through the cracks or their life circumstances don't fit into the wage economy.

What I am hoping to achieve by highlighting this proposal in the House is that I believe insights from the work Alternatives North did on this issue could be incorporated into our ongoing work on our framework of solutions. In particular, one aspect of the proposal where I see a lot of potential is their work on turndown thresholds and how these relate to disincentivizing work. The key problem with our current support model is that people avoid earning even small amounts of income for fear

of losing their support. We need to utilize and build upon the work in this proposal to get us closer to striking the right balance and minimizing disincentives to working.

The proposal highlights a savings potential of \$6.2 million from reduced administration of the current program and a balancing effect from increasing rental income for Housing NWT by \$32 million. So it may be that changes suggested by this proposal could help resolve some of the key issues with the current program without significantly increasing costs for the GNWT.

Alternatives North isn't suggesting that they have hit upon a perfect solution. Rather, they are encouraging further work to build upon their findings, and that is exactly what I will be asking the Minister of ECE to do later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MEMBER'S STATEMENT 824-20(1):
EMPOWERING THE PUBLIC SERVICE**

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During her budget address, I heard the Minister of Finance say the true story of the NWT is its people. And that is true, and the true story of the GNWT is also its people.

One of my favourite headlines I think in recent years comes from a September 2022 Cabin Radio article which reads: GNWT job satisfaction increasingly resembles shrug emoji.

So now, after evacuation, fiscal restraint fears, and constant negative news filling our social media feeds, it's a second full-time job for every resident to wake up with hope and desire for a better future some days. Public servants by and large want to give their best expert work and advice for the benefit of all residents but work culture at the GNWT doesn't always align with those desires. No one's dream as a little kid is to wake up and do battle with eApprove.

So today I ask Cabinet to think on and start to action more than just plans to prioritize healthy relationships among teams, how to empower staff to succeed, and make new decisions. I am concerned that the pieces that are coming out of the 2023 Employee Engagement and Satisfaction Survey are less than what is needed, Mr. Speaker. And I don't have questions for the Minister today. I just want to reinforce today that on budget day, the way that we get this budget rolling, Mr. Speaker, is with our people. Thank you.

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

**MEMBER'S STATEMENT 825-20(1):
HEALTHCARE SERVICE AVAILABILITY**

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, challenges with medical travel and this Minister's resistance to change are the clearest evidence that this government is failing our people and failing to uphold our treaty rights. Medical transportation is becoming ever more vital to my people and health care. Rising vacancy rates leave me people waiting longer for critical diagnosis and treatment, forcing them to seek care down south. Meanwhile, a weakening primary care services reduction to community health centres means more people are losing access to preventative care and early interventions resulting in more health emergencies. Yet, flexibility in medical travel policy is nowhere to be seen because the Minister insists our people seeks care in the North where access is increasingly limited. Our treaty rights do not depend on where health care is provided, yet the Minister is putting budgets concerns over health and ***efforts** to her treaty obligation.

Early on, I realized that outdated policies are barriers to care. Right after my election in 2022, I had a constituent in Dettah who had an organ transplant. I had to fight with his family to get an escort approved with no success. He couldn't even have his wife by his side during a major surgery and, ultimately, I ended up paying for his flight to Edmonton myself. Since then, I almost lost track of how many similar situations have come to my office. For example, an elder suddenly lost vision in one eye. He was told he would improve on his own by the local doctors, but it didn't. He sought care in Alberta without a referral and discovered he had suffered a stroke. That appointment likely saved his life, but he received no support from the medical travel without a referral.

Another constituent's weeks went without the proper nutrition as her chronic symptoms worsened. Diagnosis appointments weren't available until 2027. She eventually secured care in Alberta where she looked for an appointment herself. Again, outside policy at a cost of thousands of dollars out of her own pocket.

If we worked on solutions together, this could be a very different situation. Until then, the health of my constituents treated is nothing more than a line item, a budget, by the Minister who receives how much millions of dollars from CIRNAC each year for Indigenous health care for ***natural** people. Mr. Speaker, I seek

unanimous consent to conclude my Member's statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you. Thank you, colleagues. When the Minister spoke yesterday about administering NIHB, I asked myself what's the point of our funding going to the Minister who has so far denied my constituents the support they need. I need to know when the Minister will start prioritizing their needs and respecting their treaty rights. Because until then, I fear that every time my constituents ask for help, she will keep hiding behind the policies that override our treaties. I will have questions for the Minister at the appropriate time. Thank you

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 826-20(1):
STATE OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES ECONOMY

MS. MORGAN: Mr. Speaker, at budget time many of us turn our thoughts and worries to the economy because we have a vague sense that the economy is related to where our money's going to come from.

Economy is a word that gets thrown around a lot. The experts offer us graphs and charts and statistics, but most of us are not really sure how to interpret the numbers or the lines. What we know we care about is whether we can find a decent paying job. Some of us even care whether we can find meaningful work, where we can use our talents. And we want job security so we can feel confident buying a house or a big truck. We care about having choice when it comes to housing. We care about having local small businesses with enough regular customers to survive so they can supply us with the things and the services that we need, with unique local handicrafts and art, where we can get delicious fresh food and sources of entertainment. So where do we go to make all those things happen for us?

Usually, we go to two places. First stop, go ask the government. Communities go to the GNWT, and the GNWT goes to the federal government. Give us more money, and we will establish more government jobs, and we will build more public housing and we'll subsidize more small businesses. The second place we go is to mining companies. We send our leaders to schmooze at conferences down south, try to convince them to bring their business here. And we pay existing operators, even those close to bankruptcy, to stay just a little longer.

The problem is you can't buy a ready-made economy that serves people. You can't buy all those things that we want from a mining company, and you can't get it all wrapped up in a bow from Ottawa. You have to build it from the ground up.

I often think how is it possible that we keep hearing that there are hardly any jobs in many NWT communities, and yet in all those communities there is so much important work that needs to be done that is not being done even when there is available money to do it. How is it possible there is so much work not being done? The food that needs to be gathered, homes that need to be built and maintained and heated with wood, health services vacant, and yet we hear there are so few jobs. Mr. Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll simply conclude by saying when it comes to the economy, we have to start by looking at the work that already needs to be done in our communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 827-20(1):
CONDUCT BY MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL
CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Missing Persons Act for the Northwest Territories has just been recently legislated into law. This Act gives all parties involved tools to retrieve evidence that will help finding missing persons within the Northwest Territories. This Act is welcomed by families throughout the NWT who are grieving for their loved ones who have gone missing and would like to bring closure for their own well-being.

Mr. Speaker, with the collaboration between the authorities and the families of the missing person, communication is very important to keep the dialogue open. Well, Mr. Speaker, this was not the case when Ms. Laura Kalinek, Frank Gruben's mom, called the Fort Smith detachment and attempted to ask questions about the investigation and where it's going since the Missing Persons Act was passed.

Mr. Speaker, a member from the Fort Smith detachment did not answer Ms. Kalinek's concern very politely. In fact, she was very rude and her tone of voice scared Ms. Kalinek where she had to end her call because of the state of her mind. Ms. Kalinek did not know where to

turn to seek advice, so she put her ordeal on social media. Well-wishers from all over the NWT responded to her post and provided comfort and advice.

Mr. Speaker, this particular behaviour from the RCMP is not an isolated case. I was informed by a resident of Yellowknife where she was groped by an intoxicated person and had to fight him off. After this ordeal, the individual went to the Yellowknife detachment. Again, this lady was treated with no respect. She felt at fault and left the detachment more emotionally hurt than when she was attacked on the streets of Yellowknife.

Mr. Speaker, the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Territories are often put at a disadvantage when dealing with different agencies to improve their lifestyle and status, but when the authorities place the blame back on the victim this is totally uncalled for. We are living in a new millennium. These types of behaviours from professionals should not be tolerated and will not be tolerated. Where the authorities are treating our Indigenous population with little to no respect, it is time for change and that change will happen today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 828-20(1):
SENIOR HOME HEATING SUBSIDY

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, [Translation] **INSERT*** [Translation Ends]. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, eligibility requirements of the seniors' home heating subsidy continues to disadvantage many elders in our smaller communities. While the program is intended to support low to modest income seniors with the high costs of heating their homes, the current income threshold simply do not keep pace with the realities of living in the more remote regions of the Northwest Territories. Mr. Speaker, we all know that the cost of living in our remote communities is higher than in our regional centres. Cost of heating fuels, electricity, transportation of goods, and the challenges of maintaining aging homes in harsh weather conditions all add pressure to household budgets. As a result, seniors with modest or moderate incomes are finding it difficult to afford essential heating costs, particularly during the long winter months when temperatures have dropped well below minus 40. Despite these changes to the program's

income threshold, they remain too low for many elders who are facing real financial strain.

Seniors who have spent their lives contributing to their communities through cultural leadership, caregiving, and countless unpaid roles are now being told their income is too high, even when that income is quickly consumed by basic necessities in a high costs' environment.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot allow program threshold to become barriers that prevent our elders from receiving the support they need. I'm calling on the government to reevaluate the seniors' home heating subsidies income levels with the actual cost of living in smaller communities in mind. In a place where warmth is survival, our elders deserve programs that truly reflect the North and protect their rights to live safely and with dignity. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have questions for ECE Minister. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 829-20(1):
DONALD HAVIOYAK – CELEBRATION OF LIFE

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Colleagues, today I am going to celebrate the life of Donald Havioyak, a man whose journey began on June 11TH, 1950, and whose passing on November 20, 2025, leaves a deep mark on all our hearts.

Donald was one of 11 children of Edward and Mary Havioyak. I had the pleasure of meeting Donald on December 5th, 1987, in Coppermine. He was the assistant SAO for the Hamlet. What I found out quickly, he always was willing to help and soon we became good friends. Throughout the years of getting to know him, I can tell you Donald's life was rooted in the strengths of the land and the connections of community. He grew up learning the values that guided him throughout his life - respect, kindness, patience, and service. Whether he was on the land, with family or among friends, Donald carried those values with quiet dignity and an ever-present sense of humour.

He was known for his wisdom and generosity, always ready to lend a hand or share a story. Those who spent time with him often came away feeling lighter, wiser, and more grounded. His deep respect for culture and tradition was matched only by his love for his family, especially his wife, children and grandchildren, who were his greatest pride and joy.

Donald's life was not measured in possessions or titles but in the countless ways he lifted

others up. He taught lessons not by speech but by example through his work, his laughter, and his humble way of living. He showed that true strength lies in kindness and that leadership is found in service, and that love is best expressed through action.

Donald was about serving his community and elected to the first Nunavut Assembly in 1999, serving one term as a Minister. After that term, he served as the Kitikmeot Inuit Association president from 2005-2008. In both roles, Donald was a well-respected advocate for the preservation and promotion of Inuit Language and legacy of public service.

While his passing leaves a space that cannot be filled, his spirit remains in the stories we tell and the values he passed down and the land he cherished. Today, we do not only mourn his loss, but we honour his life, a life that touches many and continues to inspire us all.

May we continue to carry his teachings forward with compassion and with humour and with gratitude for the time we shared. Donald's spirit is now part of the land, the wind, and the stories that will live on long after us.

Unfortunately, Donald's illness took him away from the community to Ottawa and then Rankin Inlet. The staff at both facilities made his life comfortable, and the family would like to thank them for their service. His wife and children were able to be with him on his passing. Rest in peace, my friend. You will always be remembered for the love and respect.

Members' statements. Motions. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Great Slave.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to recognize my page Sarah *Galuka, and I'm sorry if I said your name wrong. I'm very happy to have you here, and I hope you have a future in politics if that's what you want. Have a good time at your Assembly. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize Jake Heron. He's the chief negotiator for the NWT Metis Nation. I just want to welcome him to the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize Alexa Crawford today, a young constituent from Thebacha. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Thebacha. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. I did see your arm this time, Member from great -- Kam Lake.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: I like great Kam Lake; that sounds really good. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize Rita Mueller who is the president of the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association. I've had the privilege of knowing her for about 25 years. I first met her when she was principal of Chief Jimmy Bruneau School. And I'd also like to recognize my youngest child who chose to come spend his afternoon here, and that's Dalan Bowden. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, first, I'd like to first say I'd like to recognize all the pages. I had a chance over the lunch hour to say hi to them very quickly and tell them that I started off as a page so don't think that -- you know, it's an inspiring role to come here, and you too, all of you, could become MLAs maybe one day. It's a great opportunity.

So specific, Mr. Speaker, to the Yellowknife Centre riding, I'd like to acknowledge *Nicolas McDonald and Jasmine Rozbottom, both students at St. Joe's middle school. Thank you very much for your work. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Recognition of visitors in the gallery. I'd also like to recognize Rita Mueller. I got to meet her a little bit before she became principal in Chief Bruneau school. She used to be the travelling -- well, was our aquatics coordinator and then our travelling aquatics coordinator, and then she went off and been teacher in Chief Jimmy Bruneau. So I welcome you here to the Assembly. As well as my wife's favourite non-child, Dalan Bowden who has touched her heart. And if I didn't recognize him in the House, I would answer for that tonight. So welcome to our House.

Recognition of visitors in the gallery. If we have missed anyone in the gallery today, we welcome you to your chambers. We thank you very much for giving us the honour to represent the people of the Northwest Territories for this

short period of time. I hope you enjoy the proceedings. It's always nice to see people in the gallery.

Replies to the budget address, day 1 of 7. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

Replies to the Budget Address

REPLY 20-20(1):
REPLY BY MR. RODGERS

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight, I am pleased to rise today to provide our response to the budget address. We look forward to the coming weeks of discussion as Members work together to consider and approve a budget that must meet the realities facing communities across the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, the world has, indeed, changed. The North is in the spotlight. That should be good news for the people we serve. As the Premier said here yesterday, the status quo is not acceptable. And on that, Mr. Speaker, we agree.

In presenting this budget, the Minister has told us it is about momentum and readiness, about shifting from restraint to action at a time of real economic pressure and global uncertainty. That is a clear statement of intent. The question before us is whether the measures in this budget deliver that shift in practice through concrete investments, realistic timelines, and outcomes people can see.

Mr. Speaker, the eyes of the country are on the North. And that matters. But alignment in words must now be matched by alignment in spending, timelines, and delivery. That is the work before us. Because here is the test that matters, Mr. Speaker: Does this budget make us ready to act and deliver on this moment? Not in a year, not as work deferred to another Assembly, Mr. Speaker, but now.

The moment is real, and eyes are on the Arctic. Defense and sovereignty investments are coming. Critical minerals and LNG developed responsibly, and together with Indigenous governments, are in demand. Northern hubs in Yellowknife and Inuvik are on the map. People far outside this chamber, Mr. Speaker, are watching to see whether the Northwest Territories can move from talk to delivery.

To fully seize the opportunities before us, whether in a national defense investment, mineral development, or the historic funding now available to advance housing, we must ensure that our own systems are not standing

in the way. Government has a responsibility to remove unnecessary regulatory barriers, streamline approval processes and provide a clear, efficient path for progress. We cannot allow our internal procedures to hinder the very opportunities that strengthen our communities and our economy.

We are a territory that is resource rich but cash poor. That gap is not a talking point. It is, Mr. Speaker, what families feel when projects stall, when jobs leave, and when costs go up. Readiness starts with land, infrastructure and delivery, and small communities feel it first. When land transfers and tenure decisions take a year, housing does not get built, gravel does not move, pads do not get prepped, local contractors do not hire. Opportunity, Mr. Speaker, passes by.

I want to be very, clear caution has its place, but the pace we are on is not caution; it is falling behind. When it takes a year to transfer land, we are not being cautious; we are falling behind.

Major projects need certainty, timelines, and people appointed to drive them. Roads, runways, materials, logistics; get the decisions made, Mr. Speaker. Get shovels in the ground. Climate change is tightening construction windows and shortening ice road seasons. Communities pay the price first on fuel, freight, and food. Waiting is not a plan. Planning ahead is. Indigenous partnership and community capacity are not add-ons. They are how the Northwest Territories works, Mr. Speaker. Small communities matter. Capacity must exist everywhere, not just in regional centres. If communities cannot act, the territory is not ready no matter how strong a plan looks on paper.

Mr. Speaker, partnership must show up as shared delivery, authority, people and tools, in a place so work moves from ideas to action. Partnership is not about saying the right things; it is about putting the capacity in place so things actually happen. Our constituents judge us by results they can see - fixing roads, good education for their kids, a crew working on a site, a training class that leads to paid work. Public services are economic infrastructure. This is not a separate conversation, Mr. Speaker. It is the same one. You cannot build a strong economy on weak health care, education, housing, or without Indigenous partnership.

Mr. Speaker, health care stability keeps workers and families here. If people cannot count on care, they will not come and they will not stay. Education and training build the workforce. From K to 12, to trades and

post-secondary, programs must line up with real jobs. If they do not, we pay twice in vacancies and in turnover, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, housing is a constant constraint. If there is nowhere to live, there is nowhere to work. That means land ready and available, approvals on time, and crews building when the construction season opens. If people cannot live here, work here, or raise a family here, the economy does not grow.

I want to speak directly about small communities. They are not a footnote in our economy; they are central to it. A quarry stalled by unresolved tenure is not a paperwork issue. It is jobs that are not created. A health cabin without reliable connectivity or stable staffing is not a minor inconvenience. It is a reason a family questions whether they can stay in a community. Missing the short summer construction window is not a scheduling slip. In the North, it costs an entire year. Readiness in small communities is practical and visible. It means gravel delivered on time, pads in place, reliable care, working internet, and flights that arrive when they should. When those basics are in place, people see a future for themselves here, not somewhere else.

Mr. Speaker, on resource development, I will be direct. We need it. It pays for services and schools and keeps our communities viable. The world wants critical minerals and LNG. We have them. We also have the standards and partnerships to do it right. Investment goes where jurisdictions are ready. If we are slow, investors will go somewhere else.

Mr. Speaker, execution is what will decide whether this moment becomes prosperity. Decide faster, put cross-functional teams on priority files, give them authority to clear barriers, report progress monthly, in public, fund training where vacancies are, build houses where jobs are, stabilize access to care that people can feel this year. Northerners do not expect everything at once. They do expect progress they can see and timelines that mean something.

Mr. Speaker, we are hearing the government say that the status quo is no longer acceptable. Again, Mr. Speaker, on that we agree. The eyes of the country are on the North, and that matters. But alignment in words must now be matched by alignment in spending, timelines, delivery. That is the work before us.

As we move through the estimates, here is what the Regular Members will be looking for:

- Land and permitting timelines that are measured and met;

- Capacity in communities to move projects; primary health care access that is more reliable this year;
- Training tied to guaranteed placements; and,
- Housing where work actually exists.

Mr. Speaker, this budget points in the right direction but does not yet meet the moment. Direction is not the same as delivery. This is not about good intentions. It's about speed, execution, and results. When decisions are slow, families pay. When capacity is thin, communities wait. When services are weak, workers leave.

We can change that. Decide faster, build capacity everywhere, deliver the basics that keep people here, then the economy will follow. Let's stop describing the moment and start delivering on it, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Replies to the budget address, day 1 of 7. Member from Range Lake.

REPLY 21-20(1):
REPLY BY MR. TESTART

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. New year, new budget, same problems. Here we go again.

Mr. Speaker, we are in a moment, and it is a moment of unprecedented change in the world that we once knew. We have heard our Prime Minister talk about this. We've heard our Premier talk about this. We've heard the finance Minister talk about this earlier today. And we just heard the chair of the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight talk about it as well. And it is beholden on all governments in Canada to move to meet this moment but, in particular, this one, because the systems that we've always relied on to save us when we are experiencing downturns just aren't there anymore.

Mr. Speaker, our economy is shrinking - 10 percent smaller than devolution and pre-pandemic levels. That represents half a billion dollars lost in GDP production. Mineral exploration is in decline and has been for some time. And not only is it in decline, but the alarm bells have been ringing on decline for quite some time, even longer than the more recent statistics, something we raised in this House with our red alert.

Mr. Speaker, adult employment is in decline. The number of working people is in decline. Youth unemployment is 10 percent higher than the rest of Canada. Power rates are continuing

to drive people from the Northwest Territories, unpredicted increases, despite efforts to conserve, to convert to clean energy. Everything gets more expensive. Affordability is out of control. Imperial Oil's Norman Wells operation is shutting down. Diavik is shutting down. Even the Capitol theatre here in Yellowknife is shutting down. When Northerners are surrounded by these obvious signs of concern and not only concern, of a real problem getting worse, they look to their government for support, especially in a territory where government services and government direction is crucial to leading the overall economy. And that leadership has been absent.

Mr. Speaker, when I ask how many jobs this budget will create or how much growth will it foster in the economy, I am told we don't know that right now, we'll have to look into it. It's more of a federal budget thing.

It should be a this-budget thing. It should be the top priority of this government, especially when we know the challenges facing the economy. The Yellowknife and NWT Chambers of Commerce are right in their open letter. Quote: Our economy hasn't grown in more than 20 years while every other province and territory has. The stark reality is proof that what we have been doing for a generation has not worked and continuing down the same path is not an option. And yet we see a budget that is more or less status quo with a few new initiatives bolted to the hood.

Mr. Speaker, this is either reckless optimism that something is going to come along and save us or calculated denial to avoid accountability for being the key decision maker on economic matters.

The future this budget and the GNWT writ large is building amounts to a planned economy of public administration jobs supported by a thin service sector to support them. We do not need to diversify away from natural resources which is the core, the stable foundation of our economy. We need to diversify away from government jobs.

Mr. Speaker, through years of sessional statements, budget addresses, policy papers and the like, the brain trust of this government has convinced many Northerners that the NWT is unable to chart its own course, too small to resist the pressures of national and international forces. How often do we hear from our constituents, from community leaders, from business owners - well, we know the government's broke. How do they know that? Because the government keeps telling them that.

Mr. Speaker, we have more money as a government than any other government in the territory. That gives us capacity to do what no one else can, and we need to start realizing that capacity. Our government has successfully lowered Northerners' expectations of what it can deliver to the point where underachievement is the standard for results, that what limited and incremental progress we make is all that is possible. This is what is called the soft bigotry of low expectations. Once famously argued for racist systems of education that essentially said we don't believe minorities are smart enough to succeed, this soft prejudice applies as well to the system that dominates our politics and traps Ministers, MLAs, and public servants in the same cycle of un-achievement. And this is simply not true. We are only as limited as we allow ourselves to be as the top decision makers for the territory. And these self-appointed limits are why the government moves so slowly to position itself to seize on opportunities to unlock our true potential.

If I have an ideology, it's one that believes in the art of possible and the power of aspiration, that the possibility to use our talent, drive, and natural resources to push above and beyond our weight is possible. I believe in ambitious public policy, taking risks, even in making mistakes if it means achieving bigger, better things for the people we represent. But we're not seeing that from this or indeed past budgets. This budget and the low expectations it sets out are a product of the system, a system of the internal economy of the GNWT, where the needs of the system are handled first and the needs of the territory and the people within it are considered secondary. Where the tail wags the dog.

Yes, there are some nice things to grab your attention in this budget: New 24/7 lab services in Yellowknife, long overdue investments in emergency preparedness, the survivor-led residential school monument, and more funding to build Indigenous capacity with our partner governments. But look closely and you'll find most of the new spending is, indeed, forced growth, maintaining policies and programs that are and seemingly always will be.

So how did we get here when elected leaders are always saying we're doing all that we can to invest in the Northwest Territories and do things differently?

Our collective budget process is one that can be defined by information overload. Members are bombarded with information and, paradoxically, this often leads to poor decision-making. For example, it is estimated that information overload of this magnitude

costs the US economy roughly \$650 billion a year in lost productivity and innovation. So it's entirely relevant to why change is so stubborn in this place of government. If we are serious about making progress quickly and effectively, then we should be first focused on the problems we want to solve, then review how the GNWT proposes to solve them along with the core functions of government. Instead, advocacy for our constituents and the communities we serve is on the back end of this process after the system has already produced its plans. Instead of proposing big ideas and finding ways to implement them, we are left playing tug-of-war between Cabinet and Regular Members over how to best use limited public resources. And in the end, no one wins. Those big ideas are watered down. Even Cabinet-led initiatives that are outside the GNWT comfort zone are whittled down by so-called risk management and internal resource demands or any other excuse why we can't go as far as we want to.

So perhaps someone does win in the end, Mr. Speaker - the status quo and those who want it to continue. This is the system that we are all up against, those who are fighting for change, the internal economy of the GNWT. Bureaucrats who know if they can just delay political pressure from Ministers and Members for four years, they can avoid real change, well-connected insiders who live fat off government procurement instead of innovating their own businesses, lawyers advising public and Indigenous governments to take longer and longer to make decisions that stretch regulatory and lawmaking processes from months to years. But don't worry, it's all billable hours. These are the forces sabotaging our efforts to build a prosperous and secure Northwest Territories. We need to stop this, Mr. Speaker, and that starts here in this chamber and the highest levels of government. If we continue to defend inefficient and ineffective systems and treat them as sacred to our governing institutions, then nothing will indeed ever change. Well, that's not true. Things will, in fact, get worse.

Look at our GDP. Look at our public debt. Look at our active employment numbers and tell me our system is working. Tell me that hope and optimism will sustain a future where there has been no plan whatever to prepare us for the moment we find ourselves in now, where our natural resource sector is shutting down on known timelines. This is not a surprise, and we have no plan to meet the moment. But Ottawa won't let us starve. That's true. But planning on what amounts to a federal bailout of territorial, economic, and social management is not my definition of peace, order, and good government. When politicians tell the system it

needs to change to meet the moment and that system says we simply can't afford it, but we are the ones who are elected to make those decisions. If we say do it, it needs to get done, even if there's some risk, even if it impacts the delicate balancing act of that same internal economy. Again, no one is stopping Members from realizing our shared ambition except the Members themselves.

This budget is not a product of true consensus government. It's not a representation of the collective goals and priorities our people elected us to deliver for them. It is a product of this system, and the system doesn't like this kind of speech, Mr. Speaker. The system wants us to get into the weeds, focus on a handful of operational issues or low-cost investments in our ridings, A job here, a school there, a road here. Mr. Speaker, it doesn't -- but otherwise, otherwise for those handful of issues, we're expected to support everything it does without any real resistance while elected officials continue to make decisions that aren't really decisions and ride the wave towards economic decline and political irrelevance. This is about box ticking rather than meaningful collaboration. It is not true consensus.

That would be all Members, Cabinet and Regular, working together, talking about what we need for our ridings, what we need for our territory, and then looking at the budget to see how we meet those needs, not to proofread the system's homework and fight for crumbs at the table. This is not about being a Regular Member or a Cabinet Member. It is about being part of this system or being part of people trying to change that system.

The gravy train is running out. Even if you are benefiting from the system today, you soon won't be. Most of these people who are beneficiaries of it will likely leave the Northwest Territories and find new opportunities to exploit. But those of us who will stay, who truly call the NWT home, especially Indigenous people who have been here since time immemorial, we will be left starting over, worse off than before. It doesn't have to be like this, though, Mr. Speaker. We can use this budget and all the other spending before the next election to make real and lasting change, to end this system of eternal economy and build a better future for our kids and grandkids. But to achieve that incremental change isn't good enough. Slow and steady does not win the race when the safe and predictable world that used to exist has come crashing down around us. Northerners need leaders who will disrupt, innovate, and actually build better governments responsive to the needs of the people we represent, of the challenges and opportunities of today.

Mr. Speaker, I have yet to see a budget in this Assembly that really does that. And I don't expect to see one either, not as long as the perpetrators of this system remain in charge and fall victim to their own soft bigotry of what this government can achieve. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Replies to the -- children, thank you. Replies to the budget address, day 1 of 7. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

REPLY 22-20(1):
REPLY BY MR. HAWKINS

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, if they like that, they'll like this one. Exactly what I'm saying, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, keeping people dependent should have been the title of this budget address. Sadness and despair abound, Mr. Speaker. You know, when I look around, I think to myself if I had written this budget, I would have taken a Doug Ford or a Wab Kinew approach. We'd be talking about how exciting times could be here in the North. We'd be talking about the rollout of the national defence spending that potentially is coming. I know it's not here yet, but we'd be talking about that. As a matter of fact, that'd be the first line, national defence spending, thank God, because, frankly, we had no other idea how to save ourselves. And close the budget. I mean, honestly, Mr. Speaker, opportunity and empowerment should be the speech. I actually decided to go and watch a couple opening addresses of other provincial speeches just to get a sense of tone. I mean, my goodness, Mr. Speaker, you can go coast to coast and how exciting they are about what an opportunity. This was not what I heard today.

Mr. Speaker, it feels often like our budget address speeches of course are all about what we can't do. I suggest let's turn that around and say this is why we're going to do it. Mr. Speaker, a government budget here, in all fairness, is not consensus in the sense of its highest form.

Now, it's true the government's going to say, well, we talked to you and we showed you the budget. Yes, that is true, Mr. Speaker. That is a fact, and let's get that out of the way. But showing up minutes before midnight and saying what do you think, I can assure you the tabled budget later today will be exactly what we were shown just, say, minutes before on the clock as they say. Mr. Speaker, if it was true consensus, the finance Minister and their cabal of expertise and knowledge people would be showing up and saying what makes a difference from your view in the economy? How do you think we can empower people in the economy? How do you

think we can get Northerners standing on their own, feeling good about where they are, where they're from, being part of the North, being part of the success of the North? Mr. Speaker, that would be true consensus about building budgets.

We'd be having, you know, whether it's a big conversation or a minor conversation in the fall, saying here are some ideas to stimulate the economy, make people healthier, stronger, faster, just like the 6 Million Dollar Man, Mr. Speaker - build them stronger, faster.

Mr. Speaker, to be fair, it is a frustrating process. Often on this side of the House, it feels as if the government is so tone deaf. When it comes to Ministers showing up with their budgets and they say well, it's 99.99 percent done, what do you think? Well, that's like a parent telling their kid we're going to Disney World, tickets are booked, hotel's booked, all paid for. What do you think? Well, of course, you know, like, there's no discussion. You're being told this is how it rolls out.

Mr. Speaker, Members need wins. I have told this Premier for over 807 days Members need to feel like we're part of the process and telling us at the last -- coming to us at the last minute and saying what do you think is not part of the process, Mr. Speaker. With 606 days approximately left in this term, Mr. Speaker, I suspect that trend will not change. I suspect Cabinet will continue to decide who they're working with and who they're not working with. We have positive suggestions.

Mr. Speaker, over a year ago, not quite two years ago, I was saying about the opportunity in national defence and the Premier was saying, my goodness, they know where we are. Our budget should be fully rolled out saying how we're going to rise to those occasions. That's why I rose yesterday to talk to the Minister of lands saying how are we going to dedicate ourselves to meet this rising potential investment. We're going to have a tsunami of investment. There's our hope. There's our opportunity. I can tell you -- and I'm sorry, I wish it was in every single region, but I am going to say Inuvik people are going to be eating, and they're going to be eating well because of that \$5 million investment. Yellowknife -- billion. Billions. See? I'm so excited. It's billions.

Yellowknife, the region, is going to see \$5 billion of investment. People are going to be eating. We need territorial programs. That's why I talked today this budget should be focusing on other opportunities. As I tried to highlight, Carney says I like multifaceted projects. We could be building our economy with the Sahtu using the Mackenzie Valley Highway and tying

that potentially -- and I don't want to send the wrong message to people here -- potentially asking Alberta could we work and maybe find a corridor for their oil that's landlocked. It was a vision Bob McLeod, former Premier of the Northwest Territories, always had. Could we tap into opportunities like that, revive that, create economies. I mean, we wouldn't be building it. It'd be up to them saying we're open for business. Stuff like that brings economic opportunity from the Deh Cho through the Sahtu up into the Mackenzie Delta area, Inuvik, even Nunavut where they'd put a -- you know, put a facility to offload it. All of a sudden we're talking about opportunities. Where are these in our budget, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, I have -- I would have liked to have seen in the budget address -- although I wish Cabinet wouldn't sort of throw away its opportunities here. If the budget had said to me well, you know, and by the way on page 4 we're going to squeeze in a name, the Whitford Building on the 50th Street, that would have made me happy. But, you know, they offloaded their opportunity to make some choices to a committee while this budget talks about trying -- this budget says well, we're going to do boilerplate stuff but nothing innovative or exciting.

I have to be fair. I have to be fair, Mr. Speaker. I've got to say something nice, of course, about the budget. I do like the 24-hour lab services, and I think the cover picture's really nice. And that said -- that said, I would have liked to have seen and heard how the government is going to eliminate the senior envoy position and how they're going to respond to this so-called everyone loves the 440,000 concierge service that picks someone up at the airport, drives them to their -- Mr. Speaker, this budget could have been smarter with its resources under the Premier's office to say if the need is people want to feel warm and fuzzy, we'll find someone to make them feel warm and fuzzy.

Mr. Speaker, but no, this budget doesn't say that. It doesn't talk about efficiencies. Mr. Speaker, we could talk about stimulating the community economy. I think as my colleague from Inuvik had pointed out, he said it takes too long to transfer land if you even get land. The City of Yellowknife constantly talks about how they have businesses and development wanting to spend money here and new money coming to town. In essence, it's like a domino effect. They come here, they bring cash, they invest, they hire people, they spend more money, more money's being spent on more money, and it's getting new money in the territory, people are working. People are working. This budget has an opportunity to

make these announcements and saying how we're going to rewrite the way we do things.

Mr. Speaker, it's a huge, huge missed opportunity. And, again, from the page of my two favourite premiers -- currently, that is -- which is Doug Ford and Wab Kinew, I could hear them say if they were planning a budget address they'd be talking about how bringing Aurora College into the future, not how it's locked in the past. They'd be talking about how we're getting this done in six months, not six years. This government, I wish they would be talking about in the Doug Ford/Wab Kinew way about how they're bringing 500 new jobs to the territory and how they're protecting 500 to a thousand jobs we're losing in our diamond sector. Rather than watching those diamond mines shutter, they'd be saying we're creating an economic environment to help make sure that there's prosperity for everyone.

Mr. Speaker, I worry that this government budget, written by the senior mandarins of our government, all control the outcome long before we even got here.

Mr. Speaker, this is an opportunity to put a wartime effort into what we need to do - take care of our people, take care of the North, inspire people to be here and want to stay here. I have met long-term Northerners that say we can no longer afford to be here. I know people I've known my whole life saying there isn't a future here. And I keep trying to tell them there is. I can't be selling this message alone. Mr. Speaker, I think there's so many things that we could be doing.

Mr. Speaker, all we often hear is about well, we're doing the best we can, we're shuffling the resources down. There's a point about maybe eliminating a few positions but we're just -- we're eliminating empty ones and all of these kinds of things, but the net outcome is we got more. I mean, to me, if they want to be efficient, we don't need the budget to do that. They could be doing that all the time if we need to be efficient with our resources. And maybe that's the question, is how do we do that. But, Mr. Speaker, building our budget and our territory's future around being lucky isn't a plan. I mean, let's be honest -- and I am going to go back to the beginning, not from the start but to the beginning point which is, I mean, we are so lucky the federal defence department is looking at spending money here. If it wasn't for that luck, I don't know what this budget would be telling us. But then I searched the finance Minister's speech online, like I pulled it up, I mean, there's such a micro even acknowledgement about the challenges in the Arctic that it should be, like I said, at the very beginning say national defence money, thank

God, because we needed it. Because I don't know what we'd do otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, I want to bring this towards a close, not close yet. But, you know, I often feel like the government is missing the bigger picture. It's all about bureaucratic process, where the budget should really be about how do we prevent things. The analogy I am going to give you really matters, and I hope it sinks in.

You know, in Hay River when they start pulling up the railway ties and the rail lines and whatnot, well, let's face it. They're not bringing the train back. That should be a stark, cold message. And we should be asking ourselves how do we stop them from pulling up the ties and the rails and that stuff. In the Sahtu and Norman Wells, when they say they're packing up, that's scary. So we should be talking about how do we resurge excitement in our economy. And this is the one time a year we can do this, by saying we're going to tap into the public sector. The GNWT isn't going to try to cannibalise their employment and expertise for the fact oh, we just have to fill out a few jobs. We should be doing the reverse, finding ways to stimulate them. I mean, look to the east, look to the west. The economies are on fire, Mr. Speaker.

The mining sector is depressing, our investment is shrinking, our economics are depressing, but our two sister territories are busier than ever. So why isn't the government, through its strategy, saying here this budget is going to be focused on how we revive the mineral sector? That is going to be the way to get us out of this death spiral of financial woe. Mr. Speaker, we are going to use this budget to empower people, to get more people off social assistance into jobs to become contributors. And I want to be clear I believe in being contributors. Now, that doesn't mean everybody has to do exactly the same as everyone else. But we're all a team. Top to bottom, north to south, we all have to work together.

Mr. Speaker, this government should be talking about, you know what, the Taltson may or may not be coming, it's so far away. When we hear oh, the economics of bringing power to lower the power and cost of living in the Northwest Territories really could be coming from somewhere like High Level, maybe through a P3 project. You know, there's better ways or maybe different ways. And to be clear, when I got elected in 2003, we were talking about the Taltson then. That's 23 years ago. So much has passed. My goodness, we could have built the line to High Level two or three times and back. And I will tell you the fact is that if the Yukon says it's smarter to bring power in from BC,

maybe we should be asking ourselves the same question.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to point out that this budget is short on vision and high on maintenance, and status quo seems the way to go. But all I know is if this was a Doug Ford budget, if this is a Wab Kinew budget, we'd be hearing about how they roll it out, roll out the red carpet and say we are going to rise to industry needs that bring money, bring jobs, bring investment, bring opportunity. But no, we missed the opportunity of this budget to be selling big projects. And I look to Premier Tim Houston of Nova Scotia and when they say they want to do projects, they put the fullness of effort into it. I've seen their wind west proposal. It's sell, sell, sell an opportunity. This budget so far is safe, safe, safe, and hopefully nobody will move and nobody will get hurt. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Replies to the budget address, day 1 of 7. Acknowledgements.

Colleagues, we're going to take a short break to give the translators a break because we're going into oral questions and then we'll be going there, so we're going to have a short break. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, colleagues. Oral questions. Member from Great Slave.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 937-20(1):
ONLINE SPECIAL OCCASION PERMIT AND
LIQUOR LICENSE APPLICATIONS

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today my questions are for the Minister of Finance on a different topic.

I have been advocating in the background for a more streamlined liquor licensing process for special events. So, Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell me if a cohesive package that includes both liquor permitting and occupancy load permit processes for special events is going to be launched on the spring timeline that the Minister previously referenced last October? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, so just, first of all, an occupancy load is a requirement for every event separate and apart. That is something that is issued by the fire marshal's office, and I

can say the departments are working together with respect to coordinating the requirements of both. I can say online special occasion permit applications have already been launched on the eServices platform. That came about in the last year. That does allow people and parties to apply for the SOP, or the special occasion permit, more efficiently, more simply. And we are looking to move that along so that the full liquor license application process can be one of the next services offered on eServices. I'd certainly be happy to -- again, a timeline on that I don't have it here with me today. And beyond that, Mr. Speaker, there is -- as I said, there's work happening on a single application process but I wasn't able just today to get a final deadline as to when that's going to be happening, but I will certainly endeavour to do that and report it back to the House. Thank you.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell me if her staff is working with the MACA's Office of the Fire Marshal so that frequently used venues will have an expedited process for liquor license and special events when the Liquor Act regulations package is complete. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Yes, Mr. Speaker, is the short answer. So the Department of Finance has worked with the Office of the Fire Marshal on this, but in doing so actually it's come to our attention that the fire marshal's office is looking to develop a more preestablished occupant load process across the board, not only for liquor licensing but that will benefit the liquor licensing process as well. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplementary. Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to both the Minister and MACA for that. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister elaborate if any other simplification of licensing and permitting under the Liquor Act is contemplated with changes to the regulations and, if so, which ones will be a simplified process compared to what it is now? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a couple of items I could speak to. One specifically is to try to reduce the number of times that either entities or organizations, businesses that have to frequently request, can stop having to do that on a repeated basis for when they're doing the same event every month, for example, that they can reduce having to go back almost on a continuous basis. And secondarily, and perhaps related, when there's an event happening in an already licensed premises, Mr.

Speaker, we're looking to reduce having to do an existing -- or sorry, to have to come back and do a licensed occupancy load, that we can just use the load that's already known for that premises. So a couple of small changes but for the folks that require this repeatedly, Mr. Speaker, hopefully significant. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 938-20(1):
CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I said in my Member's statement, there's a real need for a child and youth advocate in the Northwest Territories. I'm hearing from foster parents and biological parents in the system that in many cases there's a revolving door of social workers. Some of the foster families have four social workers in one year. Some have no contact with the kids' social worker for an entire year. They feel like they have been set up for failure, wrong information given, miscommunication. It's always their fault, Mr. Speaker, and when they complain their homes get shut down. Will the Minister responsible for the social services system, the child and family services system, support the establishment of a child and youth advocate in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, within my portfolio, you know, I understand that the Member's frustration and I know that there are a lot of barriers around this department and areas where, you know, we have to protect the child's interest and sometimes that information, you know, doesn't -- we're not able to share the information freely. However, you know, whatever route that this Legislative Assembly chooses to go, I think there's a process that we have to follow as a consensus government, and I would look forward to looking at those types of options. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, I mean, this problem is seemingly getting worse by the day. There's been a number of very serious child and family services audits that have revealed serious defects in the system. Can the Minister comment on the implementation of audit recommendations and if the department has successfully responded to all of the past three

audits of the auditor general to fix the child and family services system. Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there has been a huge overhaul in the child and family service area due to the fact of the two previous auditor general reports and a lot of the information on those reports are tracked publicly online, and there is information online as to where we are. There are some things that we still are working towards implementing as later in this 20th Assembly. Part of that work is implementing new legislation, and with that legislation will come more changes to the child and family service program. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, so one of the biggest concerns is when foster parents, in particular, are having issues and feel like decisions are not being made in the best interests of the children under their care, that they are -- their homes are shut down, they're shut out of the system. What ask the Minister -- what does the Minister recommend those foster families do in those concerns? How do they have their concerns raised so we can ensure the best interests of the child are actually being followed and not some other policy that they're not even allowed to see? So how do we ensure there's oversight and accountability of child and family services in the Northwest Territories without this position. Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the area of child and family services is really, I think, not just for foster families, for families, for the children. It is a sensitive area, and the goal of child and family services is always to return the children to their biological family or within their biological family. That is always the goal. And, you know, and I think what sometimes in foster care, some of these children do remain in these homes for a long period of time, and sometimes it takes families time to be able to, you know, do the things that they need to do to be able to get the children back into their care and, you know, and I hear that from sometimes the concerns that are brought to my office, however, our staff do try to work with foster families. I know right now that they're working on a NWT training for foster families too so that they're fully understand their role and the limitations under what can be shared with them, who's the decision-makers when these children are placed in their homes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 939-20(1):
MACKENZIE VALLEY HIGHWAY

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, following up on my Member's statement earlier, and realizing the comments made to the replies to the budget, my first request to the Minister of strategic infrastructure, when will the Minister submit phase two environmental assessment conclusion request on a timeline? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Minister responsible for Strategic Infrastructure, Energy, and Supply Chains.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, just to be clear, the focus at this time is to conclude phase one, which is the section that was approved now some governments ago between Wrigley and Norman Wells. That is what is in the environmental assessment stage right now. That's where we have a work plan that we're executing with the Pehdzeh Ki First Nation with a view to having everything filed with the board by July and therefore they can then conclude their process thereafter and to looking to have no extensions to the process. Phase two would extend the roads all the way up to Inuvik. There is significant interest in this. We're working already with the Gwich'in Tribal Council and looking to have all the governments along the way indicating their readiness to see this move forward. And also the department is starting to work with the board to see what we can do, in fact, to move this process forward more expeditiously. There are a number of ways we could potentially do that. The Member raised a few in his statements, and it would certainly be our expectation that we will find a path forward that accelerates a move on completing phase two. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear that we're realizing the value of the old 2013 data.

My next question there, Mr. Speaker, with the federal budget 2025 announcement this past November, can the Minister commit to providing PKFN and GTC with project SEED money from the avenues available? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at this point in time my hope is that we will see some additional funding coming in the near future through some reallocations that we're looking to do. So the

Mackenzie Valley Highway roadway itself, outside of the environmental assessments, had some allocations made in the 18th Assembly, projects that didn't move forward back then, and we're looking to take that money and actually put it towards this work to get it done now, projects that are shovel ready today, including the idea of community readiness, so working with the communities along the highways, making sure that they are able to participate, actively participating, engaging with their communities. We want everyone on this road to know exactly what's happening, to be ready, and to be able to support the project as it goes forward. That will make all of the board processes go more smoothly, and it's my hope that that will be happening in the near future. If there's additional needs to be coming -- that need to come forward, certainly SEED projects are available with ITI. But I'll make sure that our community engagement teams are there and working with the communities to make sure that they can be involved effectively. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for Strategic Infrastructure, Energy, and Supply Chains. Final supplementary. Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my possession, I have the tabled draft document there done by the Sahtu Secretariat called Securing Canada's Link to the Arctic. So I'll be sharing that.

My last question there, Mr. Speaker, can the Minister explain or share if the department is drafting or completed the Mackenzie Valley Highway federal engagement strategy. Mahsi.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Mackenzie Valley Highway has formed one part of this government's federal engagement strategy now since the inception of this government, and certainly continually looking to adapt that as we go forward, adapt to changing federal government and changing federal landscape and budget. But I would say, you know, there's also a very simple response, which is that every Minister raises these key issues and key opportunities with federal counterparts whenever we have the opportunity, whether it's Premier, myself, other colleagues. So there is a formal engagement strategy there. I'll make sure that to pass on to the Premier's office, that that gets recirculated. But, again, those conversations happen constantly. We want to ensure that the federal government sees this as a project that is ready to move, easy to move, and has a pathway to move forward. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for Strategic Infrastructure, Energy, and Supply Chains. Oral questions. Member from Frame Lake.

QUESTION 940-20(1):
INCOME ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, since I tabled the document I referred to in my Member's statement earlier today on potentially establishing a basic income guarantee in the Northwest Territories, have ECE staff considered the Alternatives North proposal? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Minister of ECE.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, certainly the department has had the opportunity to review the Alternatives North report and definitely appreciates the insights found in it. It certainly is worth stating that in the last little bit here, income assistance has increased its investment in its programs through the income security programs by \$5 million as well. Thank you.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I am glad the department has looked at it. Mr. Speaker, as I noted in my Member's statement, the report speaks to turn down thresholds and ensuring income assistance does not disincentivize work. If I had more time for my statement, I would have mentioned this is something that's happening to constituents of mine.

Will the Minister commit to reviewing the report and the recommendations in it and potentially changing our turndown thresholds to decrease the amount of disincentivization going on. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, as part of the review to the income assistance policies and legislation regulations was the ability of residents to actually keep more earned income as well as increasing what qualified for unearned income. So there is an ability of residents to keep up to \$350 a month of unearned income and then for earned income, so that would be as a source of employment, it's \$500 plus 25 percent of their paycheque. So there is right there up to \$850 plus that residents are incentivized to earn through other mechanisms, including through employment. There's also direct connections from income assistance to things like training opportunities, things like pathways to employability programming, programming like our student

financial assistance that leads to diplomas and certificates and degrees, and so certainly wanting to make sure that we're increasing those pathways for residents for the type of opportunities they're looking for. 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 think that what I need to emphasize from the report is that they did research on what levels would disincentivize work, and I think we're well below them, and so that's where I think the report could be valuable. And, really, Alternatives North was recommending that the government build upon this research. It's a beginning, not an end that they're suggesting. So would the Minister commit to reviewing the report and the recommendations, building upon that research, and coming back to the Assembly with proposals for changes to income support that would help it stop disincentivizing people from pursuing gainful employment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are always, as a government, so not just education, culture and employment, looking for ways to incentivize employment and create opportunities. That is a priority of mine in my role with both my industry hat and my education and training hat on and so certainly for that, the Member has my commitment. As far as the shift from income assistance to something like universal basic income, that would be a very big shift for the entire Assembly, and I would want to make sure that I have the support of the entire House for a shift like that. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 941-20(1):
TREATY RIGHTS TO HEALTHCARE
ACCESS

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just want to briefly talk about Treaty 8 that was signed on July 25th, 1900. Part of that includes health. And the NWT Metis Nation also does have an agreement with the GNWT for health benefits. But I want to talk about just briefly what NIHB stands for: Non-insured health benefits for First Nations and Inuit.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of health on the emergency supports. In case of serious medical emergencies, when patients require family escort but NIHB approvals are

delayed, particularly on weekends, my question is, I'm not sure how long this agreement's been in place but why has the Minister not established a contingency emergency fund to cover off escorts' flights and accommodations on the interim so families are not left out without support or stranded on the streets? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wilideh. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are currently working with NIHB to establish -- to try and come up with what they're criteria that they're using; however, those conversations are ongoing. When there is a medivac, this is where it becomes complicated because if it was a non -- when it's a scheduled appointment within non-insured health benefits, we also have our medical travel benefits that are for scheduled travel. So we are able to, you know, look at those within both of the rules under that and approve and use our exception area. When it becomes a medivac, this is where the GNWT does not have a policy that covers escorts under that. So it's usually NIHB clients that can put in for an escort through that process, but NIHB is the approver of those exceptions. They will not delegate. They have not delegated. In all the years that we've administered that program, they will and they have not up until this time. We are currently in conversations with them right now to be able to do that; however, you know, when there is these circumstances in place, we try our best to reach out and sometimes, you know, if we're able to we can get a hold of somebody. Other than that, you know, it ends up -- we're at the mercy of them to do the approval. Thank you.

MR. EDJERICON: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And when the treaty was signed, it talks about as long as the sun shines, river flows, and grass grows, the spirit and intent of the treaty is live and well. And it was done with the Crown. But, Mr. Speaker, right now, the policy of this government is overriding our treaties. So my question is if the Minister is unable to develop policies that uphold treaty rights and prioritize the health and well-being of Indigenous people, why should Indigenous governments trust the Minister and her government to administer NIHB on their behalf? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, medical travel is probably my top priority. What I've spent two years working on so far is the majority of the time is meeting with Indigenous communities, hearing from Indigenous leaders at the Council

of Leaders, travelling with Indigenous leaders to Ottawa to explain the needs of the residents in the Northwest Territories. Many of the issues that rely around what we hear comes to the escort piece. When it comes to Indigenous people needing access, that access is always there for them. There is no limitations on them getting insured services through it. It's when we have to fall to the NIHB policy. GNWT only administers their policy, has to follow their rules. Those funding pots that come from them is how we administer that. In other jurisdictions in Canada, the governments don't run those. They go directly. And so what it is usually in provinces that have road systems, which we don't and we understand that, so that's why it's important to us to administer this so that it's not on the backs of the residents when they're actually needing any travel. They have to pay for it upfront and then submit reimbursement. So we in the GNWT have been administering so we can cover those costs, but we have to make sure that we follow within the boundaries that we're given so that we can get the approvals to pay for those. Right now, as released today, you know, we spend \$80 million in this government on medical travel last year. \$80 million. 36 percent increase last year on escorts alone. So those are some of our most recent numbers that are -- we are doing these things, but we just have to make sure that we are within what we can spend. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again, the policies of government, and especially in health, are continuing to override our treaties. My question to the Minister is -- and I never heard an answer from her on this -- is that since we are delivering NIHB program from the federal Government of Canada, we still have people falling through the cracks in the system and that could be left on the streets. My question to you is can we or can this government commit to creating a contingency fund in the event of an emergency so we don't leave our people on the streets. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, within the medical travel policy, no person should be left on the streets; however, the process is that when people travel, there is an approval process. So if they're travelling out for medical, they need to be referred through medical process and that needs to be approved through medical travel before they travel. When escorts travel, you know, sometimes, yes, it's last minute, but if they're not approved then it may not meet the

criteria. And so how we come up with that criteria is what we're trying to look at. We're almost in completion of phase one of our medical travel modernization. We will be switching in to phase 2 which will take a look into all of those other pieces where there's escorts like, with small communities coming in for, you know, when it's escorts that are part of medical travel, med response, like air ambulance. Those are all lists of things that have been brought to my office, that have been brought to the Office of Client Experience, and those are partly going to make up what we do when we analyze and cost analyze. And through that process, we will come back to committee when we have that information, we'll come back through our Cabinet process, our FMB process, to see what those costs are. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 942-20(1):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES INVESTMENT STRATEGY

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment around what progress has been made on some of the promised economic and investment strategies.

So the 2030 tourism strategy was slated to be complete by March 2025. That was my understanding. So what is the status of that strategy; when is it going to be released and start to be implemented? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the tourism 2030 strategy is on time. It is slated to be released this spring. And as soon as it is released, it will be implemented right away so people will be able to use the strategy to its full advantage right away. And committee will have an offer for both a technical briefing and a public briefing very shortly from me. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I look forward to further conversations on how we can get going on that.

The business plans for ITI have also identified an investment strategy that it's working on, and this isn't clear to me so I wonder if the Minister can clarify whether that investment strategy is focused on GNWT investment to stimulate the

economy or on attracting more private investment or both. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the investment strategy really is a whole-of-government approach in order to really increase the size of our pie. So it is attracting third party investment from outside the territory to the Northwest Territories and is really looking to, one, build our opportunities, so both for new and emerging sectors here in the Northwest Territories, grow existing sectors, and also connect the rest of the world to the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So can the Minister tell us what is the timeline for that investment strategy, when the public will get to see it? Or what is happening now? What stage are we at and what is the timeline? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So our first step is to finalize our economic vision and have this strategy really feed into that and ensure that what we're doing beyond that aligns. It's important to note that our investment strategy isn't just focused, for example, on minerals, it isn't just focused on tourism. It really is an all-of-government approach, and it's really important that we consider things like housing investment, that we consider things like DND, that we consider our health. Our health sector is also an economic sector. And so it really requires an all-of-government approach to widening and broadening and increasing the size of the pie here in the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 943-20(1):
SENIORS' HOME HEATING SUBSIDY
INCOME THRESHOLDS

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Masi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

Mr. Speaker, seniors on fixed incomes in our small communities are telling me that the current income threshold for the seniors' home heating subsidies and other program as well is simply too low to reflect the real cost of living. Will the Minister commit to reviewing the income threshold to ensure it better aligns with

the true heating costs faced by seniors in smaller communities. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have to thank the Member for Monfwi because of her advocacy over the course of the last year, this work was done. And this is our first winter with reset and augmented income thresholds for the seniors' home heating subsidy. Thank you.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the cost of heating fuel, electricity, and home maintenance continues to climb faster than many fixed incomes can keep up. Can the Minister commit to introducing an automatic cost of living adjustment to the subsidy income thresholds so elders are not left behind when northern costs of living rise year after year. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we just increased the income threshold and so we use the updated heating costs data for the Northwest Territories and made sure that we were doing that regionally so it was reflected because we know that the cost of heat here in Yellowknife is much different, for example, than Ulukhaktok. We also use the living cost differential and as well the proportion of income typically spent on fuel in homes.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, for the subsidy rate itself, we were able to use updated fuel consumption data, fuel price information. And then because the intent of the policy is to subsidize the cost up to 80 percent of the total costs, we also made sure that it was brought up to be reflective of the goal of the policy. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many elders are being denied the subsidy despite being just over the income threshold, yet they still struggle to afford heating their homes. Will the Minister consider creating a hardship provision or flexible reassessment process for seniors who narrowly exceed the threshold but clearly face heating insecurity? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, within our income support programs, there are appeals mechanisms. And in addition, what we found with the new income assistance for

seniors and persons with disabilities is that many people that were on the seniors' home heating subsidy have actually transitioned into the income assistance for seniors and persons with disabilities where 100 percent of their fuel costs are covered within that program. So there may also be instances where people are in the wrong program and actually can work with their client navigator to make sure that they get put into the right program as well. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 944-20(1):
CONDUCT OF ROYAL CANADIAN
MOUNTED POLICE PERSONNEL

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Justice surrounding my Member's statement.

The Missing Persons Act is supposed to improve dialogue between the authorities and the families of these missing persons. I don't understand at this time and age how discrimination-like behaviour can be allowed to take place. Is your department aware of the incident between the RCMP member from Fort Smith and Ms. Kalinek and if so, what's being done to rectify the situation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Minister of Justice.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the Minister I'm not directly involved in the process within the RCMP. They are at arm's length from us. Having said that, there are a number of initiatives that the RCMP partake in in the Northwest Territories when it comes to, you know, addressing issues and improving the relationships with Indigenous governments and Indigenous people all across the NWT. You know, the commanding officer here at G-division has made mandatory that all of the officers take the GNWT training on cultural awareness. There is an initiative as well at the federal level that's Canada wide that the members take appropriate training. RCMP are also required to take the northern history course, Indigenous cultural awareness and sensitivity training. And, you know, I think it goes without saying that we need to ensure that the RCMP members are delivering services to the people of the Northwest Territories in a respectful -- culturally respectful and very respectful way. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the Minister willing to meet with the

superintendent of that G-division and look at how this incident has taken place and what's being done to bring some clarity and some comfort to Ms. Kalinek? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the RCMP are a contracted service to the GNWT and so in my role as Minister of Justice, I would not get involved into HR related matters, if there is an identified issue. However, as the Minister, also part of my responsibilities are to ensure that policing services are delivered in a satisfactory manner. I'm responsible for setting those policing policies which include, you know, building and strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities and certainly understand that we need to establish those relationships. You know, the history of that relationship has not been one that has been very, very good, and I think it's important that as we move forward, we continue to build on that, and I think the commander -- commanding officer has certainly committed to that in his work that he's done and the programs that he's implemented in G-division. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplementary. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 945-20(1):
DENTAL PROFESSION ACT

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions will be for the Minister of Health and Social Services because I know she loves my questions, and I'm always here to please.

Mr. Speaker, the Dental Professions Act is a very particular one. I'll try to do some comparisons later in my follow-up questions to the law society. But it falls under the envelope of the department of health, and they set up a professional licensing office, and they have a registrar chief of professional regulations and the position is currently vacant from what I understand. Could the Minister first clarify that is the position vacant, or do they have a review officer acting in a temporary basis that oversees the professionalism and the concerns of integrity, be it legal, ethical, or competencies, of dental practices in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't have that level of detail of staffing right now in the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when that group is actioned, similar to the law society and if there's an outcome that needs to be scrubbed but pointed to a reference point at least that someone had practice concerns, etcetera, they would highlight that. Does the, again, the professionalism of the dental industry through their professional licensing office publicize in some form or matter that if some type of disciplinary hearings or outcome had been found in their particular case wanting in some way, and is it publicized, and is it accessible to Members such as ourselves? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that information, but what I will commit to is finding that out and giving that information to all Members. Thank you.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the Minister able to speak to the structure and the performance of the particular office, whether it's, you know, in place, it's staffed, it's got a budget, etcetera? What can she tell the House? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I have many briefing notes in front of me and that's not one of the ones that I have off hand so I won't be able to answer the question today, but I will provide an answer. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 946-20(1):
SENIORS' HOME HEATING SUBSIDY
INCOME THRESHOLDS

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just following up on my Member's statement and my colleague from Monfwi's line of questioning for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment around the fuel subsidy for seniors. And I know that the income threshold has been raised. I don't have the exact number, I think it's around 83 to 85,000. My question is will the Minister -- because I don't think it's enough. I don't think it's close. Will the Minister, once again, take a look at that to ensure that a single person heating a home in

Inuvik, that that threshold is adequate. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Member is almost right. It was raised to \$87,000, was the highest in zone 3. Zone 2 is \$75,000. Zone 1 is \$66,000 a year of annual income. And I'm more than happy to work with education, culture and employment to provide the substantiation for those amounts to the Member so that we can kind of work with together to see what that was based on and provide that information to the Member. Thank you.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I really appreciate that offer and I certainly will take her up on that given to heat a home in Inuvik, just a small home, is between a thousand and 1,400 a month. So it is quite expensive to do that.

Can the Minister -- I mean, I'm not quite sure how this program is subscribed. Is it something that's been oversubscribed, or is it something that, budget-wise, it has been all allocated each year for that? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is a program that we -- if we need to -- if somebody qualifies for it and we need to find additional funding within the department, we make sure that we find those dollars. Thank you.

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

MR. RODGERS: Thank you. That's certainly good to know. Maybe we can find some more dollars.

But on the policy itself -- and, again, I understand and I appreciate the Minister going to give me an update on how those income thresholds have been chosen, like many policies -- and I mentioned in my statement about being culturally appropriate, and when you're developing policies rather to just be based on numbers and on stats and on CPI and those things, is there also any -- I guess, is there a cultural lens put on that policy to say, hey, sometimes things are a little different, particularly in smaller communities around, as I mentioned, seniors having children and grandchildren living with them and dependent upon them as well. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I agree with the

Member that this is of the utmost importance. And there is a lot of multi generations living in one home, and it's important to note that the seniors' home heating subsidy considers the income of only the senior. It doesn't consider the household income and everyone else that may be in the home as well so that it doesn't disincentivize people from living with their family members. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 947-20(1):
CANADIAN NORTHERN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AGENCY MEMORANDUM
OF UNDERSTANDING TO STRENGTHEN
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND
DIVERSIFICATION

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on January 27th, CanNor and ITI signed an MOU to strengthen economic development and diversification, and the substance of this is to align efforts to support resource development and infrastructure, explore opportunities for more efficient pre-regulatory assistance and coordination for projects and convene a first of its kind northern Indigenous governments and development corporations project funding symposium.

So can the Minister just tell us how -- as MOUs are not, you know, structured legal agreements with money attached and all that kind of stuff, what is the actual impact of this to the Northwest Territories' economy? What is it worth? How much growth are we going to see from -- and new funding and investment from CanNor through this partnership? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, central to this MOU is the fact that we have a lot of different projects that are coming at the Northwest Territories. Many members mentioned them today in their replies to the budget address as well as their Members' statements. It was mentioned by the Premier in his address as well. And so those investments are things like the DND funding that we're seeing come to the Northwest Territories, the Mackenzie Valley Highway, the Arctic economic and security corridor, even the project, the Taltson expansion. And it's really critically important that with all that funding that's coming to the Northwest Territories that we're prepared in ways like working together, like we heard from Members today, that we're making sure that we're addressing things within

the regulatory system, that we really do rely on our partners to be all at the same table in order to address. We have a comanaged regulatory system here in the Northwest Territories, so it's not just the GNWT at that table. So everybody needs to be at the table in order to address these items. It's also -- the Member mentioned the Indigenous development corporations. It's also about relationships with industry and making sure that we're aligning ourselves both as government to industry partners, government to government partners, but also industry to industry partners and what role do we all play together in making sure that we're capturing these opportunities and being able to leverage other pieces of funding in order to make those work. For example, the labour market agreements, how do we make sure that those are very purposefully working with our partners at the table to capture these economic opportunities that are coming our way. These conversations are very much already underway, and this is a very exciting time for the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, if there wasn't an MOU and I asked the Minister how are you supporting coordinating project development in the Northwest Territories with Indigenous governments, I think she would have given me the same answer. So my question specifically is what difference does this MOU make in terms of, like, better supporting these projects? And what are the practical effects of the MOU on our economy for these projects? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can say I want these people at the table all I want but now I can say they are at the table. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Well, is it the table of the symposium or the table going forward? Like, I'm trying to get a sense of what the MOU actually produces in operational terms, I guess. Is this -- is there a timeline or a schedule to look like? Is there -- are there contributing pots of funding? Like, what -- what is it beyond a piece of paper and a great agreement? I support this kind of coordination, but what I'm trying to get at is what is the real investment? Because I like to see announcements at Roundup. I like to see announcements everywhere we go. But I like to know what they actually mean in practical terms because when you create these kind of expectations that this is going to achieve a lot of results and then we're still asking hey, what did that MOU mean at the end of the day, especially when our chambers of commerce

are asking, so can the Minister give me a clear picture of how this is going to change things in the short to medium term as the MOU runs its course so we have some -- so we can see some more progress on these projects and more growth in the territory. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this means that we're addressing things like duplication. It means that we're addressing things like gaps. It means that I'm sitting down with, you know, people like the parliamentary secretary for CanNor, which I just did on Friday, less than a week ago, to have conversations about what is next, how do we implement this, how do we work together, and also being able to sit and have very meaningful conversations around scopes of information requests, being able to have conversations around filling board appointments, that are things that were brought forward to this Cabinet by committee for the Standing Committee on Environment and Economic Development. So it's taking the words from this whole House, not just Cabinet but also Regular Members, and bringing them forward to our partners that we need at the table in order to make those things happen. So it's not just talk. We're actually actioning things, and we need to do this right now because there's such an opportunity in front of us for the entire territory. And we are meeting the moment. We don't want to lose this opportunity. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 948-20(1):
BASIC INCOME PILOT PROJECT

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to follow up a bit further on the earlier questions I was asking. The Minister mentioned at the end of her final answer about establishing a basic income guarantee program throughout the NWT. I would just say that that's not really what the report was asking for. What the report was asking for is a basic income guarantee pilot, which is a very different thing. And I want to encourage the Minister, I want to encourage Cabinet, to try new things. I think it's pretty clear that income support isn't working. Would the Minister commit to establishing a basic income guarantee pilot program in the NWT?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, an

investment like this, like a pilot, would require approval of significant dollars that would have to first be approved in this House. Thank you.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, I would be happy to approve whatever funding is needed if it was brought forward as a proposal. So, again, I would just ask -- I mean, what I'm trying to encourage the Minister to do here is have a look at the report, consider the possibility of establishing a pilot. It doesn't have to happen in this budget, but I'm just wanting us to move towards change, move towards trying new things. Would the Minister consider looking into it? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I definitely want to be responsive to this entire House and what people want to accomplish together. I will say that universal basic income is typically an unconditional benefit, and I'm hearing lots of desire to see conditional benefits brought back to this House and so I think it's really important that before the department goes away and does a tremendous amount of work that everyone is on the same page and is -- that the majority supports something of this nature, so I think that is an important first step. 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 would just note that the report itself speaks a lot about disincentivization of work like we've talked about in the House, and so I think absolutely, we all do need to agree on the direction that we're going, and I hope through conversations that we can do that. But what I'm trying to encourage the Minister to do here is take something, some research that's been handed to the department, and use it to help improve the program we've got and think about new programs that could be brought in. So I'm just hoping the Minister will take what I'm asking for here and just understand that I am looking for them to consider it and bring forward consideration of it as we continue the conversation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm always open to new ideas. I'm also always open to ideas that really inspire and support people to -- you know, the Member mentioned opportunities to re-enter the workforce. That's why we have that reintroduction, or increase rather of earned income. I'm also looking at other mechanisms to work with very specific employers and very specific communities that are willing to look at actually bringing people on and supporting them up to thresholds as kind of a reentry and

getting their first step back into the workplace or into the workplace for the first time. And so really working with residents and addressing some of the concerns that they have about entering the workforce and potentially losing their income assistance. And that can be very scary for residents. And so I think it's really important that we work with residents, and sometimes those are big steps and sometimes they're smaller steps, but every step matters. And so my answer is absolutely yes, I'm always happy to consider new ideas, I'm always happy to read reports. I have read this report and certainly happy to continue this conversation with the Member as well. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 949-20(1):
TREATY RIGHTS TO HEALTHCARE
ACCESS

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Members of this House here have taken an oath of office to respect and honour the treaties. And earlier in my comments, I was looking for an answer in regards to a contingency account to help treaty members that travel -- that needs help to travel south or for as medical escort accommodations, flights, etcetera. I never heard back. I mean, the Minister didn't come out and say that she will look at developing a contingency account to help our treaty members. My question to the Minister is is she willing to set up a contingency account to help treaty members and Metis members, yes or no. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when we create different processes throughout our consensus government, those that are going to be locating dollars, those have to go through our financial process. So at this time, we are working through that to be able to come forward with some type of other benefit for those who are travelling for medical escorts and things like that. But at this time, we do not have that in place. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you. I just want to keep bringing that up because we got to respect and honour the treaties that we have.

My next question would be is that back in the 19th Assembly, we had a Minister that wrote a policy on a Friday and implemented it on Monday. And my question to you is are you

able to do the same thing here, to write a policy, to implement it on Monday, to create a contingency account so that our treaty members and Metis members are protected? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as within the NIHB, we are a third -- like, we administer their funding. I'm not aware of a policy that was written on a Friday that allocated dollars to something and that was passed on a Monday, so I would have to take that back and see how that -- fast that process could happen and utilize our processes to put -- you know, to look at it. But however, we are working towards a new process for medical travel. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you. Just to help you out, the Minister that did that back in the 19th Assembly was the MACA Minister. Anyway, moving forward, I guess the GNWT right now has -- or managing NIHB program right now. My other question would be is in British Columbia, the First Nation health authority administers NIHB on behalf of the federal government. If we can't manage it here and we can't build collaboration with Indigenous governments, is the Minister considering the creation of a similar Indigenous-led health authority here particularly as part of the government's commitment to implementation of UNDRIP? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the First Nation BC health authority structure is a lot different than in the territories. What they do is they collaborate all of their reserve health centres, so all of the health centres that fall on their reserves were before operated by Indigenous Service Canada. We, however, in the Northwest Territories do not have any First Nation funded directly reserve health centres and therefore we -- so they took that -- they drew that down within their own correlation with their health services. We have many different Indigenous governments. We are working in different areas with different Indigenous governments as what they want to draw down. We've worked with some of the self-governing. We're working towards some areas where self-governing communities want to draw down certain powers through health, and we're always willing to work with them. Now with NIHB, we've had many conversations at the Council of Leaders. Indigenous governments want to draw this service down; however, they do not want to draw it down until Indigenous Service Canada funds it accordingly and

through a reimbursement so that they're guaranteed that they're going to get their money back because if an Indigenous government drew this down right now, we're sitting at \$40 million that we have to pay for through medical travel that is not funded by the federal government. So we have covering a lot of this cost. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 950-20(1):
ALZHEIMER SOCIETY OF ALBERTA AND
THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have another question for the Minister For Health and Social Services, only because I know she felt she didn't get enough --

MR. SPEAKER: Member.

MR. HAWKINS: -- through the last one. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to serve.

Almost a year ago I brought up the Alberta, NWT Alzheimer's Society and the fact that they wanted to connect better with the GNWT, in particular the department of health. And my question is what type of update can the Minister provide? Because I've looked on our website, and I see very little when I search that collaborative relationship that was supposed to exist. Thank you.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I had the honour to meet with that group, and when we walked away from that meeting, there was a commitment from my department to work with them and how that we could support them into -- you know, engaging with a lot of our small communities. And so that work is ongoing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And for the record, I had a delicious meeting with them too. That said, they had said that there would be things -- they gave me a prelude -- maybe not a line by line what happened, but they said there would be ways that the health website would be able to connect and direct people to service supports through the Alberta/NWT Alzheimer's Society. The only thing that points to Alzheimer's, it's a PDF, Mr. Speaker, is a booklet going through Alberta Blue Cross. Can the Minister explain why there's nothing linking the two relationships

a year ago said that they would build? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, how we are going to work with the Alberta Alzheimer's Society, NWT/Alberta, I know that there were conversations in sharing information; however, where we are with that, I can't give the Member an update as to the website. I will get back to the Member as to how we plan on putting that information out there or what the collaboration is at this time. So I'll leave it at that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 951-20(1):
INCOME THRESHOLDS FOR SUBSIDIES
FOR SENIORS

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this is questions for -- regarding heating subsidy program for seniors.

So many of our senior citizens living in small communities do not have the luxury of relocating or moving south of the border where cost of living is less. Will the Minister commit to lifting income thresholds for programs such as heating subsidy for senior citizens over 65 years of age in the NWT? Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you in small communities, you will not find senior citizens living on \$200,000 a year pension. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the advocacy of the Member. The way the program is designed today is to support our most at need -- or most in need seniors and elders in the Northwest Territories. And so the program is designed to support them with up to 80 percent of their fuel costs under this program. And if they're not able to meet their monthly living needs, then their client navigator can support them to move over to the income assistance for seniors and persons with disabilities that has a once-a-year program application. And under that program, it pays for the full rent costs, full utility costs that an elder might have as part of their living expenses. Thank you.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Mr. Speaker, you know, many of our senior citizens in small communities, they're not going to go anywhere. They're not going to move away

from their respective communities because they have families there. They have their culture, their language. So a lot of them are going to be -- are going to remain in their communities. So for that reason, that's why I was asking that if the Minister can commit or work towards to lift the income threshold instead of all these programs that the elders have to go through. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't want elders to leave their home communities either. If we removed the income threshold for all elders, all seniors across the Northwest Territories, we would have people that would -- that had large pensions that were able to access the program. And so that's why we have the program that is new to this Assembly, is the income assistance for seniors and persons with disabilities so that if people's monthly income is not meeting their needs that that program is where it will help them meet their monthly needs, and it will cover their full utilities. Because we don't want elders to have to leave their home communities if they aren't able to meet their monthly living needs. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Mr. Clerk.

Follow-up to Oral Questions

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Rule 7.2(7)(2), I have received follow-up information for the following oral questions from the first session of the 20th Legislative Assembly: 774, 839, and 869. These follow-ups will be printed in full in today's Hansard. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Colleagues, our time for oral questions is up. Oral questions. 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 Finance.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 448-20(1):
2026-2027 MAIN ESTIMATES

TABLED DOCUMENT 449-20(1):
2026-2027 GOVERNMENT OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES ANNUAL
BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE

TABLED DOCUMENT 450-20(1):
LETTER FROM MINISTER RESPONSIBLE
FOR THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
POWER CORPORATION, DATED
SEPTEMBER 2, 2025, TO BOARD OF
DIRECTORS REGARDING 2025 DIRECTION
LETTER TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following three documents: 2026-2027 Main Estimates; 2026-2027 Government of the Northwest Territories Annual Business Plan Update; and, Letter from Minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation, dated September 2, 2025, to the Board of Directors regarding the 2025 Direction Letter to Board of Directors. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for NTPC. Tabling of documents. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

TABLED DOCUMENT 451-20(1):
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR FOLLOW-
UP TO ORAL QUESTION 839-20(1),
EMERGENCY BACK-UP GENERATORS IN
SCHOOL

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: Additional Information for Follow-up to Oral Question 839-20(1), Emergency Back-up Generators in School. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Tabling of documents. Minister responsible for Housing NWT.

TABLED DOCUMENT 452-20(1):
RESPONSE TO MOTION 64-20(1), NAMING
OF THE 50TH STREET AFFORDABLE
HOUSING COMPLEX

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: Response to Motion 64-20(1), Naming of the 50th Street Affordable Housing Complex. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NT. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Notices of motion for first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Second Reading of Bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters. Tabled Document 449-20(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): I now call the Committee of the Whole to order. I am going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. What is the wish of committee?

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And committee wishes to consider 2026-2027 Main Estimates, Department of Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly and the Department of Finance. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you, we'll take a short break. Thank you.

--SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 449-20(1), 2026-2027 Main Estimates. We will now consider the Legislative Assembly. Does the Speaker wish to bring witnesses into the chamber?

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Yes, I do.

MR. SPEAKER: Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

Would the Speaker please introduce his witnesses.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. On my left is Harjot Sidhu, acting clerk of the Legislative Assembly. And on my right is Miranda Bye, deputy clerk, Members and precinct services.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. The committee has agreed to forego general comments on the Legislative Assembly. Does committee agree to proceed to the details contained in tabled documents? Committee?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. We will defer the Legislative Assembly summary and review the estimates by activity summary, beginning with expenditures on behalf of the Members starting on page 8. Are there any questions? Seeing none, no further questions. Please turn to page 9.

Legislative Assembly, expenditures on behalf of the Members, \$9,011,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Moving on to the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, beginning on page 10 with information items on page 12. Are there any questions? Seeing none, no further questions. Please turn to page 11.

Legislative Assembly, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, \$717,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Moving on to the Office of the Clerk, beginning on page 13, with information item on page 15. Are there any questions?

I am going to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can the Speaker just explain what are the two additional positions being added to the Office of the Clerk. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. For that detail, I'll turn to Miranda, please.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Deputy clerk.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Deputy clerk.

MS. MIRANDA BYE: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the Member for the question. The two positions in this budget are a new position for information and technology, an IT specialist with the Office of the Clerk. And there is an intern position that had sunset last year and is being added again into this year's budget.

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

MS. MORGAN: Okay. Is the intern position, like, externally funded, or that's always been internally funded but you're saying it was sunset last year and the position -- there was no position this past fiscal year but now it's being reintroduced. Can you just explain whether there's been someone all along but it's been somehow funded differently, or if there was sort of a position missing and now there's going to

be an intern position once again. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: I will start and then I'll turn it to the deputy clerk if we need further. So it's funded internally, and it's an internship like anything else from other departments within the government. So you apply and sometimes you don't get the funding available, and so we have to find it internally through that. With your permission, Mr. Chair, I'll ask the deputy clerk to fill more on there. Thank you.

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

MS. MIRANDA BYE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is an internship that we had initially applied for two years of funding for. We were approved for that but weren't able to fill the position for the first year. So we were funded last year for this intern, and now that has lapsed we are funding that same intern with internal resources for the second year.

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

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thanks. And finally about the new IT position, is this a time limited, like a term position, or is it indeterminant? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. For that detail, I'll turn to the deputy clerk, please. Thank you.

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

MS. MIRANDA BYE: Mr. Chair, this is a position that the board has approved for a period of two years. As an independent entity, the Legislative Assembly manages many of its own services internally, and there is currently a need for more specialized capacity in IT, so this will be funding for the first year of that position.

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

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

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Is there any further questions? No further questions, please turn to page 14.

Legislative Assembly, Office of the Clerk, \$12,085,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Agreed? Thank you. Moving on to the Office of the Speaker beginning on page 16, with information items on page 18. Are there any questions? No further questions, please turn to page 17.

Legislative Assembly, Office of the Speaker, \$567,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to statutory offices, beginning on page 19 with information items on page 21 to 23. Are there any questions? No further questions, please turn to page 20.

Legislative Assembly, statutory offices, \$4,253,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Members, please return now to the Legislative Assembly summary found on page 5, with information items on page 6 to 7. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions, committee, I will now call the Legislative Assembly summary.

Legislative Assembly, operations expenditures, total Legislative Assembly for 2026-2027 Main Estimates, \$26,633,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 449-20(1), 2026-2027 Main Estimates. We will now consider the Department of Finance.

Does the Minister of Finance wish to bring into the House witnesses?

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

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

Would the Minister please introduce her witnesses.

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

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

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 directorate starting on page 160, with information items on pages 162 to 163 is. Are there any questions?

I am going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. With regards to the NTPC line under directorate, it has been removed entirely, and I'm just wondering if the Minister can confirm whether contributions to NTPC are expected to continue in future years to offset increased costs, or does the department have a long-term plan to minimize those contributions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I mean, being realistic I would expect that there's a very reasonable chance that there will be still a need to continue to support the cost of power and by providing contributions to NTPC that eliminate when there's, for example, low water events, so on and so forth. But that said, Mr. Chair, it certainly would be the long-term preference, and therefore plan, to avoid having to continue to subsidize power. So it starts to bleed into efforts that are being made within the strategic infrastructure, energy and supply chains division, specifically under energy, so I won't get into too much detail, but it's that bigger picture that will ultimately provide greater resiliency, greater sustainability of the energy services which will reduce reliance on diesel which reduces volatility and provides, again, ultimately a better -- a better, more secure system. And when we achieve that, then there's less need to be continually subsidizing power. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the Minister. I guess just from a pragmatic point of view then, since this item is no longer

existent in these main estimates is this, then, an area that would be covered by the larger cushion that the GNWT has projected into this year. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Sorry, I'm just realizing, Mr. Chair, although the director's pointing it out, that maybe I misunderstood the Member's point here, that they're -- partly that the -- there are still going to be continuing expenses. They are moved over to the Office of the Comptroller General. It's in the broader sense that the comments exist around whether or not, you know, the Government of the Northwest Territories writ large will need to continue to offer subsidies, but there are still ongoing specific subsidies that do now exist in a different division. Sorry, Mr. Chair, I'll just pause at that and maybe ask if I could go back to the Member. I missed the second part of her question. Apologies.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, and forgive me if any of these questions are off point, but it's sometimes hard to know where to ask business plan questions so I am going to direct some of them here and hope that we're on the right page for it.

The first thing I wanted to ask about was the macroeconomic policy analysis. That policy I know is being used to assess projects and provide a macroeconomic lens to projects as they're brought forward and something I've wondered about, and talked to the Minister about a fair bit, is whether we'd be better off using macroeconomic analysis to inform our actions at a higher level rather than having staff produce reports about projects that they're already bringing forward.

So can the Minister help us better understand how the macroeconomic policy analysis is being used and whether we've considered changing the analysis to give us kind of more high-level direction in terms of what sort of projects we should be bringing forward as opposed to assessing them after they've been brought forward, if that makes sense.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the question does make sense, thank you. So the macroeconomic policy framework, this is something that was first established way back in 2007. It wasn't

necessarily being brought up to a decision-making level or well-integrated into decision-making processes or arguably well-known within departments that were charged with providing the kind of information that then goes forward for decision-making. And so this is part of a process here now to bring this lens in for decision makers when they are deciding whether or not to advance or to accept a decision proposal. It is for the public, Mr. Chair -- I will be mindful of time, but it is something that has 14 different criteria upon it that look at different types of consequences. So, for example, the likelihood of an economic impact on a small community, the number -- you know, job impacts that there may or may not be. For instance, whether or not there's likely to be economic growth as a result. And yeah, so there's a number of different -- as I say, 14 different lens criteria. And I'm happy to have them -- I think we can probably put them forward here if they're not already available online among the other FMB materials that are available online. What we are doing now is having departments fill those out when they bring forward decision proposals, and that then puts them through the deputy minister's committee but more importantly it brings them to the financial management board so that when we're evaluating the decisions that are put before the FMB that comes with the macroeconomic framework. I take the Member's point, that if we integrated that somewhere earlier on that that might give a different -- you know, a different lens. The question is at what point in the decision-making would we do that? There are policy processes, particularly on the capital planning side, but -- you know, for example, that determine whether or not a project should advance.

Better stop there, Mr. Chair. I know the time's getting short. So I'm happy to keep having this conversation with the Member. At this point, this is a much more integrated framework than what it was a few years ago. But, again, it's continued to evolve. I think it's better than it was, and maybe it needs to evolve again. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I -- well, I guess Yellowknife North isn't a lake but I said -- I always say it's easy to get the lakes of Yellowknife mixed up because there are quite a few of us.

Mr. Chair, the next thing I wanted to ask about is, you know, it's clear the carbon tax offsets has come down significantly. What isn't clear to me is where our carbon tax revenues are at with

the change. Because I know that obviously the carbon tax on residents has been eliminated but we still have an industrial carbon tax. What kind of revenue are we still bringing in from that, if any at all? And how is that being used? Is it -- can the Minister help us better understand that? Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Over to the director, please.

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

MS. TRAM DO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The net carbon tax revenue for 2026-2027 is projected at \$4.8 million, and that figure is a net figure which means the estimated gross carbon tax of 28.66 less the large emitter rebate, approximately 23.86, for a net of 4.8 million, and it is in the revenue summary page of the mains. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. MORSE: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, so that's a pretty significant revenue decrease that's happened. And I'm just wondering how are we managing that. I mean, how is that going to affect our programming? Maybe this isn't the right department to ask the question, but it's just one that occurred to me.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I mean, build in any revenue changes to part of the fiscal framework that we have in terms of understanding what are the total revenues, what's the spread between revenues and expenditures. How that, in turn, impacts the operating surplus which could impact, you know, what number of projects we want to advance under capital in a year or can make a decision obviously to enter into a deficit position, mindful that there are parameters within the fiscal responsibility policy. So it is exactly part of that bigger picture, is that when we know that there's going to be a significant change like that, you do need to adjust accordingly. So yeah, it's not, you know, on the scale of hundreds of millions. It was a \$14 million net revenue. Now it's 5. So it is a decrease, but it's also not one that is so substantial as to, yeah, completely create a huge gap.

One last comment since I'm on that topic, Mr. Chair, that was -- when there is a huge swing, it can impact the adjustment of the territorial formula financing grant which does come in and

can adjust based on a significant revenue loss on a three-year average, moving average. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also note that the contributions to the Northwest Territories Heritage Fund have fallen off a cliff. Can the Minister help us understand what happened there? Is that just a decline in resource revenue, or is there more to that story?

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Chair, let me put that one first to the director, please.

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

MS. TRAM DO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Resource revenues are projected to decline to approximately \$6 million and of the \$6 million, 50 percent goes to the federal government and then the remaining goes to the fiscal benefit for Indigenous governments, 25 percent. And then of the balance remaining, 25 percent goes to the heritage fund. So the resource revenue decline is based on projections that are provided to us with the department of ITI in terms of resource revenues projected, I guess, over a five-year term. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And certainly it is difficult watching those resource revenues decline and even more difficult watching it divvied up and half of it sent to the feds and by the time we're done with it, there's not very much left. I am wondering, though, with the little amount that we are bringing in, considering how much it's reduced, I'm wondering if the Minister has considered increasing the percentage that we are contributing to the fund to try and take the small amount that we're getting -- I realize it is a very small amount -- and put it into this fund to help it grow. You know, I don't have a ton of time left, but I've noted in other discussions the different efforts that Alberta is making to grow their heritage fund and they're taking windfall profits and putting it in there and, you know, effectively trying a lot of different things to help grow the fund, and so I'm curious to hear from the Minister if the department has considered doing anything along those lines to account for the fact that the contributions are declining. Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So that's not a suggestion that we had received and -- or one that was being under consideration here. I mean, the sums are fairly small. They're not really on the scale of what, obviously, Alberta has the opportunities to bring in. I mean, the one exception would be in the extremely rare, and I think now going forward unlikely, circumstance where a few years ago there was a significant discovery license that was turned back in and there was a bit of a windfall from that but with the changes under the minimal resource regime that we are in, that is no longer to be -- likely to be the case, and so we are unlikely to be seeing any kinds of windfalls of that. With that, Mr. Chair, actually -- and I think I said a review. It was recommendations from one of the standing committees. So yeah, I mean, happy to go back and have a look at those. But, again, without these windfalls coming forward, which, again, with the changes they're unlikely, there's really not a lot now. You know, yeah, if, in fact, our mineral resource fortunes turn around in the next little while, perhaps it would be time for a review. I'll stop and leave some time on the clock. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. What we'll do is we'll take a short 25-minute break and we'll resume with the Member from Yellow North and the Member from Great Slave. Thank you.

--SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Welcome back, everybody. We're going to the next Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just let me get my stuff fired up here.

So I wanted to start by asking the Minister about the -- so the business plan talks about -- or it has in the past talked about seeking input or internal submissions from staff about ways to be more sustainable, and we've also heard about the red tape reduction working group, so efforts to try to streamline things within government, help small businesses, but also help identify, yeah, opportunities to streamline, you know, within different departments. So I'm wondering about the status of both the red tape reduction group and the sort of internal efforts at gathering information from staff as to how things can be streamlined and more sustainable. Can the Minister just start by talking about the status of those things. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, let me start with the deputy with respect to the red tape reduction working group, please.

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

MR. BILL McKAY: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Chair. So the red tape reduction working group was a working group which took suggestions from the public that identified areas where the government could perform functions or services more efficiently. They got a number of submissions which they undertook to address. So one of the bigger ones were just the hurdles it takes to start a business. So they made some progress on that and tried to reduce the time and effort it takes to start a business. So that was one of the things that they had accomplished. And then it was moved into -- from -- not that the Member probably cares about this, but it was moved from fiscal policy to management board secretariat and in the evaluation unit so that new programs can be evaluated through that red tape lens, and they can continue to look at other areas where they can reduce red tape. So part of that is -- the Member mentioned -- was hey took suggestions from the public service. And that suggestion box remains open. So as they come in, the red tape reduction working group examines them and sees what's kind of -- if they can undertake those actions. And the Minister mentioned a couple of things that came through, for instance trying to reduce the amount of paper that's used in the government, putting those into -- more things into electronic records. I mean, that was suggested multiple times but we have made progress in that. And then just recently, we launched what was called the Visa One program, which is a paperless Visa approval process, so -- and it also empowers employees a little more to make those decisions because the manager can then see online all of the Visas and all of the transactions so you don't have paper going from department to department. So all that to say red tape reduction's still working. It's still making progress. Always there -- probably more work that can be done, but there is an opportunity for the public service and the public to make suggestions to that group. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you for that. Do staff ever find out what is done with their recommendations or suggestions? Like, is there that feedback loop where you might go

back directly to staff and tell them what you tried to do or did do or have further questions or clarification; what does that feedback loop like? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. BILL McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So admittedly, we do need to improve that. We do do reports from the red tape working group, but the last one was produced in 2022. So we are working on having more regular reporting as to what work the red tape reduction working group has done. And then one of the ways we are going to increase awareness, particularly among the public service, is to put updates on the Bear Net newsletter that goes out to all employees. So they'll -- it'll tell -- it will not signify specific employees or thank you for that suggestion, but it will say these are the suggestions we have adopted from employees. And we'll try to encourage people to continue submitting suggestions. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. So that's one reason employees should be reading that Bear Net newsletter.

So I'll just move on now to the macroeconomic policy framework. I don't want to repeat what my colleague had talked about. One of the concerns that I have had -- I mean, I think this kind of thing is necessary. We do need to put a macroeconomic lens on decision-making. But when I've looked through the framework so far, it seems that there are no -- there's no direction or tools on how to compare the stats that are given to anything else. So if it says, okay, we've made this proposal, it's going to create five jobs in a certain community, it's like, okay, is that a lot? Is that a little for that amount of money? You know, if it's for a couple hundred thousand dollars, like wow, what a great deal. If it's for \$10 million, maybe five jobs isn't a lot. But, like, in terms of the scale of whether the macroeconomic impact of a certain policy or project or initiative is, like, good value for money or is it the best option, like, if -- I don't see, but maybe the Minister can clarify if there's a way in that analysis to compare it to alternative options, like, this is the best option from a macroeconomic perspective as opposed to option B, C, and D, best value for money. You just kind of have this proposal sitting there with nothing to compare it to and you go, okay, I guess it seems like a good thing if it's going to create a couple of jobs but compared to what else? So can the Minister comment on whether that aspect is incorporated at all into the

macroeconomic policy framework analysis? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, again, this is something that has evolved I think fairly significantly just in the last year or so as compared to where this policy has sat since 2007. It is something that gets filled out by the departments, but they can certainly and do seek support from management board secretariat, which is the division that supports the financial management board, and it's part of that element that goes in. But then one thing that happens is that the financial management board does get an analysis done in support -- that's meant to really support the financial management board, the same thing with Cabinet decision items. So there's an analysis that's done of a submission, and it includes an analysis of these kinds of things, of the -- sorry, these kinds of things. I'm looking at the macroeconomic policy framework. So that is where a comparison can arise, where you may say, you know, compared to a past submission, compared to another submission, you know, and the relative value of something is this. I'm giving examples because depending upon the decision that's being made or the matter that is at hand can determine the kind of information that might be provided and the extent of it. So this is a tool that is used first at that stage of the analysis as well as then by the decision makers who receive both this as well as the analysis I'm describing.

There is also -- so, you know, yeah, and it's, I would suggest, a challenge generally of trying to, you know, compare, but compare fairly things that are often very difficult to compare. I mean, we're faced with the decisions on the needs that are coming forward, some that are forced -- that may be a forced growth -- let's just say for forced growth, for instance. The needs of one department in the region are going to be very different than another department in another region. They may not compare very well but they both may be very relevant and they both might have, you know, various indicators.

So comparison is hard. We're trying to use this as a tool to provide more information in a way that you're getting at least the same information about all the things. As I said earlier, I'm happy to see this continue to evolve, so if there's more ways that we can continue to be more effective, I think that's good feedback to continue to receive.

The last note before I -- I'll make sure I leave some time here. There's indicators of progress. Those line up with the indicators you see every year in the budget papers. And those are things that we are now looking to try to utilize when we're evaluating whether or not it's been effective. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I know this is a much bigger discussion we'll continue having both in public and behind the scenes, so I'll just leave it there for now. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. REID: Do you mean Great Slave?

MR. MORSE: I think you mean Great Slave, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Yeah, my apologies again. Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can I get my 15 seconds back? Thank you. Appreciate that. Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

When it comes to the management secretariat, the Minister knows my absolute favourite topic is government renewal, and so I am curious if we could just start the conversation today about the progress on the government renewal initiative and on evaluation efforts generally across the GNWT. I realize that it's progressed so that departments are now proposing -- I'm not sure on a regular basis, a semi-annual basis -- lists of programs that they want to evaluate. But so far since, I believe it was 2020 or 2021 when the Minister first introduced this program or this initiative, what are the broad successes and what -- where does she see improvements that could be made? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So first of all, Mr. Chair, I do have as part of our briefing materials an overview of all the departments that have gone through government renewal processes of the program and service that they had selected. So not every single program and service was selected for a detailed evaluation or for evaluation light, if you will, but there were selections made by each department based on both areas where there was considered to be higher need but also in areas where the department knew that

there would, you know -- that they'd be useful. So, for example, the youth and child counselor program in ECE was one that had a full evaluation done -- I was going to say last year, but it was in 2024. So, you know, market housing, for example, was done for Housing NWT. And what I'd suggest I can do, Mr. Chair, is I can provide, by tabling or as the clerks deem appropriate, the full listing so that you can see which programs have all been evaluated or which are maybe still outstanding to be complete. We are anticipating a full completion of the slated programs by this spring.

With that, the program -- or the GRI does shift into being one of a standard approach where there's meant to be a cultural shift towards programs being evaluated on a regular basis and departments having the capacity to do so either directly or in work with the management board secretariat. 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. And so something caught my ear just now. How does the Minister define higher need for evaluation and how will departments be supported as that function devolves into their hands to identify highest need programs for evaluation? What are we basing that decision on? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I could say some of the earlier iterations of briefing materials I had had more detail on how those decisions were made. At this point, we were just completing the work. So happy to provide the earlier tools that were used to determine which programs might be most appropriate. I don't -- yeah, I don't have it here. There was a matrix that departments were using to try to figure out which would be most appropriate and which programs might benefit from it. I mean, quite frankly, every program would benefit from it but the capacity to do that was simply -- is simply not there. And, really, the undertaking of that task, if you consider the extent of all programs and services across government, would really be quite overwhelming. But we are now getting into a place where four years or five years ago there was no organized or concerted evaluation progress. There was no dedicated place or program within which we would do these things, and there was no expectation that it would happen. That has all now changed, and departments can start to put their programs to a more organized way. So, again, I'm happy to

put that matrix into the bucket of things that we'll put back before Members. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Now the reason I bring it up is I do note that MBS is removed to two positions in this upcoming -- or this proposed budget and so when we talk about GRI, when we talk about red tape reduction, it does give me a little bit of pause. I do really appreciate their expert lens on these issues. And so I am very curious as the GRI evaluation -- whatever we're calling it moving forward -- moves forward, what sort of expectations, what sort of matrices that departments are going to make these decisions on what to evaluate, who holds them to account, will it still be MBS, is it just something they're running off and evaluating whatever they choose willy-nilly? Is there some sort of centralized function considered still to have that lens of a central agency on evaluation, what is prioritized for evaluation. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, just to describe the positions that were eliminated, I might direct it to the director, please.

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

MS. TRAM DO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We have two positions being reduced for MBS. We have the management board secretariat analyst, and we have an office administrator. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. REID: Thanks, I do appreciate that detail but it is still one analyst, so my previous question around who is overseeing a central function of evaluation, or is there a contemplation of a central function of evaluation throughout the GNWT and its agencies? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, it was a vacant position, or it is a vacant position right now. This is with respect to the analyst. The expectation is that with GRI as a sort of having kind of been spun up and had to be established, the full inventory had to get done of all programs and

services, you know, the matrices of what programs come through had to be brought together, a lot of that preparatory work was no longer -- was not required, and so that's where it no longer needed to have quite the same level of capacity. Again, obviously everything we do could certainly benefit from more money, more people, more things, but being within reason the progress and the shift into being ongoing long-term policy evaluation, the department was confident that they'd be in a position to do that with the staffing complement that they have as they shift into being more a regular cultural approach to -- like a staff cultural approach to evaluation as opposed to a standalone thing. Obviously, we'll have to see, you know, over time. If that doesn't prove true, Mr. Chair, we can certainly come back to it but -- and, again, I'm happy to provide a bit more detail on, you know, where the department sees it going. I just don't -- you know, I don't have the GRI detail at that level in front of me. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you. And I do appreciate the Minister might not have the extensive detail I'm asking for today. But I do have one more question, which is, is there an expectation, then, that each department and agency will start to build up their monitoring and evaluation capacity? If not with PYs, perhaps with training of staff internally? I recognize that there are some departments who are already well on their way to -- or have had a monitoring and evaluation unit for quite some time, ECE being the most shining star in that bunch, but other departments and agencies are not in the same shoes. So is there a contemplation of training, if not PYs? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the management board secretariat does continue to play a role. It has -- just as it has throughout. There's some departments that simply wouldn't make sense to create these kinds of positions as standalones necessarily, and so that's where MBS can step in. But as far as some training components with that respect, if I could turn it over to the deputy, please.

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

MR. BILL MCKAY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So there is training offered by MBS for staff to improve their evaluation function within departments. So that's also available, as the

Minister mentioned. We're also undertaking a policy development course which is available to policy advisers, and that includes an evaluation component as well which is -- it's underway right now. So I think there's about 40 people enrolled in that policy development course. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Is there anything further question from the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: I'll give you your 10 seconds back, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Is there any further questions from Members? Okay, seeing none. No further questions, please turn to page 168.

Department of Finance, management board secretariat, \$53,274,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to the Office of the Chief Information Officer, beginning on page 172 with information items on page 174. Are there any questions?

The Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, okay, first question, so we have heard that about a year ago, January 2025, the CRTC, the Canadian Radio Television and Telecommunications Commission, announced that they were going to introduce some sort of subsidy for internet services in the North, and so I wonder if the Minister can update us what is happening with this promised subsidy for internet. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wish I could give more information on what they are doing with that subsidy. I would certainly also like to see it introduced. Our understanding, the last time that we checked in with them, which staff in the department certainly do, is that they're still trying to figure out exactly how that might unfold, how it would be administered, and -- yeah well, how it would be administered. So, again, we'll continue to remind them that they've made this -- or this -- that they've created this obligation and that folks are very much on baited breath to see it. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay, so we will keep waiting on that one.

I know that there has been a reorganization of the technology service centre into finance. I think it falls within -- generally within the chief information officer over the last few years. And so my understanding was the idea was to find efficiencies there. And so can the Minister explain what kinds of efficiencies have been found? Were there any redundancies in positions that were able to be streamlined? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, I don't -- this was something that was underway prior to now but certainly wasn't, to my understanding, necessarily an area where the combination of the two things would lead to dollar savings so much as it would lead to improvement in how the department was functioning, where you previously had technical staff with expertise in one area, technical staff with related expertise in another area, but no ability necessarily to provide redundancy or backup one to the other. So that problem has now been eliminated. Areas that there have been some savings generally aren't -- again, not necessarily from -- expressly from the fact that there's been a combination of TSC under the OCIO, but they have made some changes that I think are related with respect, for example, of moving our -- one of our cyber security softwares has saved about \$100,000. Renegotiating our long-distance expenses has saved us over \$300,000. And even just changing our boardroom video conferencing software systems, again, \$200,000. So approaching about a million dollars in savings by just adjustments in terms of the software and outsourcing the hardware that we use. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Okay, no, I'll leave it there. Thank you for that information. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Is there any further questions? No further questions, please turn to page 173.

Department of Finance, Office of the Chief Information Officer, \$26,307,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to the Office of the Comptroller General, beginning on page 175 with information items on page 177 to 178. Are there any questions?

I am going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, can finance provide more details on the \$5.5 million increase in funding for employee medical travel assistance and the \$2 million for employee dental services? Medical travel has continued to increase over time. Is there an expectation that it will continue to increase in future budgets? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the funding request is being driven by growth in the public service, which then increases of course the number of individuals who are eligible for receiving benefits as well as their dependents, as well the rise in airfare costs post-COVID that have really not seen much reduction, not significantly so since then. Changes in flight schedules impact the availability of flights and also can lead to increases in hotel accommodations for folks who are coming from areas where some flight schedules have been reduced. In addition to that, Mr. Chair, there's been a significant change in dental referrals and the need for medical travel associated to what were really often fairly simple and routine dental services previously, but then with the loss of a number of dental services during and post-COVID, that has resulted in significant cost changes in that regard. As far as do we see them continuing, there are a variety of efforts underway to see that they are not continuing. Really, those are being led by the Department of Health and Social Services predominantly in terms of trying to address medical travel efficiency, medical travel referrals, and dental service availability. On our side, for staff specifically, a couple of the changes underway and coming soon would be to provide public servants with the ability to do their own travel bookings. We made an effort to roll this out as a bit of a test, determined that that was more complicated than we had hoped, but we do have a contract in place right now and are hoping to make it available more widely so people can make their own bookings. It takes a step out, makes the system hopefully easier for folks, and hopefully then does provide savings if people are making their bookings in a more timely way. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, that's interesting and good news and probably will alleviate a lot of stress for people on the last-minute end of things.

I have a question from the business plan, and I apologize if this is not the correct area or activity to discuss it. I might have missed my chance under the policy group; however, I would note that in the business plan update that the Insurance Act and Payroll Tax Act have been dropped from the legislative initiatives listing in the business plan. And I recognize that all of Cabinet has done an undertaking to prioritize legislation coming forward in this Assembly; however, I'm curious as to why this one fell off. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, Mr. Chair, I mean, there was obviously -- there's only so many people who do the policy work which provides the drafting instructions and then so many people who do the actual drafting thereof, and it was determined that neither of those two areas were considered to be priorities given the limited months available and some of the other needs that has arisen in the interim. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And yeah, no, fair enough. I suppose, too, that my understanding of the insurance act is not so much that we necessarily control what insurance companies do in the territory rather we allow them to provide their products in the territory. I do have more policy questions in that area, but for the interest of time and everyone's tiredness, I will stop there. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you to the Member. Is there any further questions? No further questions, please turn to page 176.

Department of Finance, Office of the Comptroller General, \$145,120,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. There are additional information items on page 179 to 184. Are there any questions? Thank you, Members. Please return now to the department summary found on page 157 with information items on pages 158 to 159. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions, committee, I will now call the department summary.

Finance, operations expenditures, total department, 2026-2027 Main Estimates, \$354,984,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I move that this committee defer further consideration of the 2026-2027 Main Estimates for the Department of Finance at this time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

---Carried

I will go back to 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. I will now rise and report progress. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): It's been a long night. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 449-20(1) and would like to report progress with one motion carried. And, Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Can I have a seconder to the motion? Member from the Sahtu. All those in favour? All those opposed? Unanimous -- too late.

MR. HAWKINS: Recorded vote.

MR. SPEAKER: Actually, you want to do that? Member from Yellowknife Centre has asked for a recorded vote. All those in favour, please stand.

RECORDED VOTE

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu): The Member from Range Lake. The Member

from Inuvik Boot Lake. The Member from Monfwi. The Member from Frame Lake. The Member from Great Slave. The Member from Mackenzie Delta. The Member from Yellowknife North. The Member from Thebacha. The Member from Yellowknife South. The Member from Kam Lake. The Member from Hay River North. The Member from Hay River South. The Member from Inuvik Twin Lakes. The Member from Nunakput. The Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. The Member for the Sahtu.

MR. SPEAKER: All those opposed, please stand.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu):
The Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: I don't quit.

MR. SPEAKER: Any abstentions, please stand. Very close vote. 16 in favour. One opposed. Zero abstentions. The motion is carried.

---Carried

Reports of Committee of the Whole. Third reading of bills.

Orders of the day, Mr. Clerk.

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu):
Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Friday, February 6th, 2026, at 10 a.m.

1. Prayer or Reflection
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Replies to the Budget Address (Day 2 of 7)
7. Acknowledgements
8. Oral Questions
9. Written Questions
 - Written Question 26-20(1), Physician Recruitment and Retention Yellowknife North HSS
 - Written Question 27-20(1), Medical Travel Yellowknife North HSS
 - Written Question 28-20(1) Paramedic Contracts

- Written Question 29-20(1), Application of Waters Act Provisions to the Sale or Transfer of Mining Assets
- 10. Returns to Written Questions
- 11. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
- 12. Petitions
- 13. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
- 14. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
- 15. Tabling of Documents
- 16. Notices of Motion
- 17. Motions
- 18. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
- 19. First Reading of Bills
- 20. Second Reading of Bills
- 21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
- Tabled Document 449-20(1), 2026-2027 Main Estimates
- 22. Report of Committee of the Whole
- 23. Third Reading of Bills
- 24. Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Friday, February 6th, 2026, at 10 a.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 7:24 p.m.

UNEDITED HANSARD