



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
**LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY**

1st Session

Day 75

20th Assembly

UNEDITED HANSARD

Friday, February 6, 2026

Pages XX - XX

The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker

This is an unedited Hansard

Send corrections to kate_covello@ntassembly.ca

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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

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UNEDITED HANSARD

YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Friday, February 6, 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 10:01 a.m.

Prayer or Reflection

---Prayer or reflection

SPEAKER (HON. SHANE THOMPSON):

Please be seated. I'd like to thank Mary Jane Cazon for the beautiful prayer and reflection this morning. Ministers' statements. Minister for Housing NWT.

Ministers' Statements**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 170-20(1):
CAPITAL DELIVERY STATUS UPDATE**

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Housing NWT continues to repair, retrofit, and construct housing across the Northwest Territories at a rapid pace, establishing a strong economic foundation in the North and more homes for Northerners, two of this government's top priorities.

In the two years of this government, 81 new homes have been built, many of them for seniors and singles in communities outside regional centres. Singles and seniors are two priority groups susceptible to core housing need and vulnerable to forms of homelessness as determined in the preliminary findings of Housing NWT's recent territorial housing needs assessment.

An additional 219 housing units are in the planning, procurement, and construction stages, demonstrating the results of historic investments being made in housing by this government and Canada.

Alongside new construction activity, Housing NWT continues to invest in retrofits, repairs, and maintenance of existing housing to improve conditions. With the additional funding support of the Government of the Northwest Territories over the next three years, we will spend more than \$30 million to repair over 600 homes.

These repair projects support local employment and trades training opportunities across the Northwest Territories, including the

development of apprentices working through a decentralized Housing NWT trades team pilot and with local housing organizations and NWT contractors.

Mr. Speaker, over 95 percent of Housing NWT contracts are with local and NWT businesses, providing a range of economic opportunities in communities across the Northwest Territories.

For example, this fall, Housing NWT signed a contract for 84 homes to be manufactured by METCAN Building Solutions, a majority Indigenous-owned modular manufacturer based in Hay River. This contract will support sustained local work as these modular homes are produced, transported, and set up in communities across the territory over the coming two and a half years.

Housing NWT has also signed contracts with Indigenous governments, including a contract which will support the K'ahsho Got'ine trades centre, a local modular manufacturing and trades training centre in Fort Good Hope. Through this contract, the trades centre will manufacture four homes for the social housing program, with materials arriving on the winter road. Over the next two and a half years, eight local work assignments will be supported through this project, helping build skills, capacity and long-term benefit for residents of Fort Good Hope.

In Fort Smith, the business arm of the Fort Smith Metis Council is constructing a duplex, with work continuing through the winter. This contract demonstrates Housing NWT's commitment to partnership and economic opportunities through its capital delivery.

Housing NWT also continues to engage with Tlicho businesses through the GNWT and Tlicho Infrastructure Cooperation Agreement. Currently, five modular homes are in production and another ten are in the planning phase. In addition to these construction projects, Tlicho businesses are involved in Housing NWT's repair and maintenance projects. This work, taken together, provides regional opportunity for capacity building and economic benefit.

In addition to these modular manufacturing initiatives, Housing NWT has developed a

hybrid method of construction that optimizes the potential of modular manufacturing for a compact service core with onsite work to complete the full home. Two proof-of-concept duplexes using this method are in the final stages of commissioning in Deline.

Housing NWT continues to work in partnership with industry and Canada's National Research Council to refine the concept in preparation for future scalability.

Housing NWT continues to demonstrate innovation in housing delivery by using modern methods of construction. An example of this is the 50-unit mixed-use building in Yellowknife, where off-site production of mass-timber and building envelope elements are proceeding during the winter months, and will allow for rapid assembly of the structure in the spring.

Mr. Speaker, the projects underway represent an enormous effort by this government to prioritize housing. We are building more, and we are moving towards delivering services in person-centered, data-driven ways to improve social outcomes. This is a result of strong collaboration by Members of this House and reflects a strength in government that I am proud to be a part of. This collaboration and funding continues to bring us towards improving the suitability, accessibility, and affordability of housing in the Northwest Territories.

I want to emphasize that these investments reflect only a portion of the work that is underway. Housing NWT continues to actively leverage existing capital funding to expand the capital program. I look forward to sharing plans for further housing developments in the near future, and will continue to share progress as we deliver more homes for Northerners. Quyananni, Mr. Speaker.

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

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 171-20(1):
FOLLOWING THE NORTH STAR: PRIMARY
HEALTH CARE REIMAGINED TOGETHER

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, across the Northwest Territories, residents want better access to primary and community care that feels safe, respectful, and connected to culture and community. Indigenous residents have been clear about the harm, discrimination, and inequities that they continue to experience in the health and social services system. These experiences affect trust, access, and health outcomes in ways that cannot be ignored. This

is why our government is working in partnership with Indigenous governments to transform how health care is designed and delivered in the Northwest Territories.

One of the steps in this work was Following the North Star: Primary Health Care Reimagined Together, a summit held in Yellowknife from January 20th to 22nd. The summit brought together Indigenous governments, leaders in health and social services, and partners from across the Northwest Territories and other northern, rural, and remote regions of Canada.

I joined the participants and toured the interactive learning exhibit supported by the department's community, culture and innovation team. I want to acknowledge the elders, organizers, partners, and artists whose leadership grounded the event and strengthened relationships.

Mr. Speaker, the cultural safety and antiracism exhibit was emotional and powerful. For many participants, it reflected truths their families and communities have carried for generations. It showed how colonial policies and systemic racism still shape Indigenous peoples' experiences in health and social services. It also affirmed the strength of Indigenous cultures, languages, and ways of knowing as central to healing and wellness.

The summit created space for honest conversations and new thinking about primary and community care that reflects northern realities and Indigenous priorities. Participants learned from promising models of care in other jurisdictions and discussed how they could be adapted to our communities. What we heard will help shape the primary and community health care framework scheduled for release this spring.

This work continues through the Northwest Territories Council of Leaders health and social services working group. The working group supports a partnership between Indigenous governments and the GNWT that honours Indigenous authority and community priorities. It recognizes that sustainable solutions must be rooted in Indigenous knowledge, strengths, and lived experience.

I also want to acknowledge the Health Care Excellence Canada for their support of the summit and their commitment to Indigenous-led, equity-focused improvements to care.

Mr. Speaker, Indigenous approaches to health and wellness were described as our North Star. They set the direction for change and they remind us that there must be accountability for cultural safety and equity across the system.

For residents, this means working towards care that feels safer, more connected, and closer to home.

Throughout the summit, Indigenous governments spoke with honesty about moments when they did not feel heard in past processes or did not experience collaboration as balanced. Their guidance is essential. The future of primary and community care must be shaped through Indigenous leadership and shared decision-making. Our government reaffirms its commitment to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and supporting Indigenous self-determination in health.

Mr. Speaker, the summit is one step in a long journey, transforming primary and community care that will take time and continued partnership. Our goal is healthy people and communities, where Indigenous residents, and all residents, experience care that is culturally safe, community centered, and responsive to their needs. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 172-20(1):
GROWING NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
BUSINESS

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I want to talk about opportunity - opportunity that strengthens communities, creates pathways to employment and entrepreneurship, and positions Northerners to capitalize on the heightened national and international interest in the North. As the Minister of Finance said in yesterday's budget address, a strong Northwest Territories builds a stronger Canada, and that strength begins with our people and the opportunities before them.

Across the Northwest Territories, people are looking for practical ways to build their careers, grow their skills, or start a business. They want to contribute to the future of the territory and to be part of the economic shifts underway. Our government is committed to clearing the path and ensuring that Northerners can seize the opportunities that Budget 2026 describes - opportunities tied to a changing global landscape, new economic pressures, and increasing national attention on the North's strategic importance.

Entrepreneurs and small businesses are central to this work. They create jobs, deliver services, and bring forward ideas that keep communities vibrant and resilient. When local

businesses succeed, they help ensure that Northerners, not outside forces, shape the story of the North.

As the budget address underscored, sovereignty is expressed through our people, and supporting northern businesses is one of the most direct ways to strengthen both our economy and our role in Canada's future.

Mr. Speaker, advancing these pathways requires strong collaboration across government. That is why the Departments of Education, Culture and Employment; Industry, Tourism and Investment; and Prosper NWT are working together to support employment readiness, business development, and long-term economic growth. Today, I am pleased to highlight two initiatives that reflect this integrated approach and align directly with the momentum described in the territorial budget.

First, Prosper NWT has increased its lending and investment limit from \$2 million to \$5 million per business enterprise in the priority areas of housing, critical minerals, large-scale infrastructure, and emerging technologies.

This increase is a major step forward; one that opens the door to bigger ideas, larger projects, and economic transformation. It responds directly to what businesses have told us for years: The North needs more capital to grow.

Second, Prosper NWT has secured \$2.3 million over three years from the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency to establish the AI Driven Entrepreneurship and Business Support Centre. This centre will help northern businesses adopt new tools, streamline operations, and access emerging economic opportunities. It also supports the budget's focus on supporting a diversified economy and ensuring Northerners can participate fully in sectors that are rapidly evolving.

Mr. Speaker, these initiatives are not about programs alone. They demonstrate our government's shared commitment, across departments and alongside partners, to build the conditions that allow Northerners to thrive. This work is about making practical changes that help people and businesses move forward together. It means we step back to look at how we do business and step up to celebrate our neighbours.

The North is full of talent, drive, and creativity. By working together across governments, business, and communities, we can support that potential and turn it into real opportunities for Northerners and when we do, we build a stronger North and a stronger Canada. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of ITI. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Frame Lake.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 830-20(1): POWER RATES

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I live on a street in Yellowknife that's become locally famous for festive Christmas lights displays. At the height of December, you'd be filled with Christmas cheer driving by all the twinkling lights, and many folks cheerfully kept them up through the beginning of January, at least until the December power bills showed up. Just like that, Mr. Speaker, Christmas was over on 57th Street, and the reality of our rising cost of living landed with a dull thud, like a sack of coal.

Residents are struggling to make ends meet and are asking what we can do to help. Power rates in the NWT are the highest in the country so are naturally top of mind in this conversation.

Mr. Speaker, I intended to speak mostly about our power rates today, but by strange coincidence we also suffered a long mid-winter power outage last night which has brought the challenges our system is facing to the top of mind for an even more troubling reason. Our infrastructure is aging and desperately in need of upgrades, and our Minister has been working tirelessly on moving the Taltson hydro expansion forward, but I wonder if we've been neglecting some more basic actions we could take to stabilize our system in the near term. Some ideas which have been floated to me are expanding the capacity of the Bluefish reservoir, expand uptake of renewables, do a policy review on rate regulation, switch from a public utilities board to a rate review council, or make changes to the Public Utilities Act for regulatory efficiency, to name a few.

What I want to emphasize is we should approach this issue with urgency and creativity and not let smaller solutions fall by the wayside as we strive for a panacea.

Mr. Speaker, the recent announcement of military investment in our communities is a major opportunity to turn our power narrative around. The military are going to want to ensure there's reliable power available and have been clear with us they want to move these projects forward in a way that benefits our communities and doesn't add burden to our strained systems. I have to give the Minister credit, Mr. Speaker. When we were going back and forth on housing funding last budget, she said to me we really need to be focusing on our aging

power infrastructure as well. I agree. So let's get to work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 831-20(1): AFFORDABLE HOUSING

MS. MORGAN: Mr. Speaker, today I want to highlight a good-news story about community-led affordable housing, something that has been going so well for so long that we hardly pay any attention. It's Northern United Place in Yellowknife which was established in 1976. It provides 125 low-cost housing units for independent people earning less than \$60,000 a year, and rent is geared to a tenant's income. The building includes another 41 student housing units that are leased by Aurora College. All of this is run by a non-profit called the NWT Community Services Corporation. They've been able to operate these non-market affordable housing units for 50 years without relying on the government for operating funding. Imagine that. So how have they managed it?

Back in 1976, the Community Services Corporation arranged to have five lots amalgamated. They bought two lots from the United Church and acquired the other three lots from the GNWT for a small sum. The non-profit has leased out the commercial parts of the building to pay for the operation and maintenance of the residential units. Various agencies have been anchor tenants on the commercial side. First, GNWT departments used it as office space and since 1997, Aurora College has been the anchor tenant. Most recently, the non-profit has secured \$17 million in federal loans in order to upgrade the building envelope and improve energy efficiency to help extend the life of the building for another 40 years, and these renovations will begin in the summer of 2026.

Tenants of NUP report that they feel safe and secure. The building experiences very little damage, and there are few evictions. And this is in the heart of our downtown. Tenants come from across NWT communities and the world. Everyone from college students to seniors become good neighbours and help each other out.

The risk is that we take this affordable housing for granted. I mean, it's easy to forget about them because they're not in crisis, and they don't ask the GNWT for subsidies. But this model could collapse if they lose their anchor tenant. Aurora College is considering moving

out of NUP when their current lease ends in 2032.

Mr. Speaker, we need to appreciate the success of this non-profit affordable housing model. In order to protect those 166 tenants, we need to ensure they continue to have a stable anchor tenant. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Members' statements. Member from Sahtu.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 832-20(1):
BENEFITS FROM MACKENZIE VALLEY
HIGHWAY

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have risen in this House on numerous occasions to speak about the Mackenzie Valley Highway. Today I want to shift my focus from engineering and logistics to something equally important - the profound social improvement and economic prosperity this project will deliver to our communities and the Northwest Territories, keeping in mind, Mr. Speaker, the best social program is a job.

Mr. Speaker, let us envision that project funding has been secured and construction is underway. By taking a strategic sectional approach, building the highway infrastructure in phases from south to north or vice versa, we immediately unlock the substantial business and employment opportunities across the Mackenzie Valley region.

This sectional approach is an economic development strategy. As each section breaks ground, local contractors can bid on this earth works and site preparations and developments. Regional suppliers will provide resources, fuel, and equipment, and personnel staff. Service providers will find new contracts.

This is not a single construction site, Mr. Speaker. This is a corridor of economic activity stretching hundreds of kilometers down the Mackenzie Valley. Mr. Speaker, civil engineering projects of this magnitude typically allocate 30 percent of total sales for labour. Hundreds of millions of dollars flowing directly to the northern workers in good paying jobs: equipment operators, surveyors, environmental analysts, monitors, skilled tradespeople. These are careers that will support families and create pathways to prosperity thus creating a disposable economy.

Mr. Speaker, of that 30 percent labour allowance, approximately 45 percent will be seen by governance through taxes. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement. Mahsi.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you, Mr. Speaker; thank you, colleagues. Income taxes, payrolls, consumption taxes, corporate taxes, fuel revenues, those are all realized benefits from projects like this. Beyond construction, there's the prosperity of maintenance. The highway becomes a permanent economic corridor providing dual access, reducing transportation costs. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I will deem my others as read.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 833-20(1):
POLICE SERVICES IN TSIIGHTCHIC

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The community of Tsiighehtchic and its residents should not be treated any differently from those who live in regional centres or the city of Yellowknife because of the population. The residents from Tsiighehtchic pay taxes and therefore should be provided the essential services like those who live in large communities.

Mr. Speaker, the community and its residents have been requesting police services to be provided to their communities for decades. The status quo from this government and past government is no longer acceptable. With the high rate of crime throughout the NWT, especially in communities where the police presence is nowhere to be seen, the ongoing high rate of hard drugs entering our communities, police presence is more prevalent now than ever before.

Mr. Speaker, the First Nations and Inuit policing program that was initiated in other parts of the NWT would be a great starting point and bring security to the concerned residents of Tsiighehtchic. Fighting crime by civilians is no longer an option because of weapons and placing yourself in immediate danger or your life. It is time for this government and the Department of Justice to look at innovative solutions to bring relief to the community of Tsiighehtchic and its residents. We no longer need a band-aid solution. We need permanent policing in the community of Tsiighehtchic and other small communities throughout the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, I have stated numerous times before, echoing the concerns of my predecessors, Richard Nerysoo, David Krutko, more recently Fred Blake Junior. The time for action has passed. Let this government make the right decision and provide the much-needed services that the community of Tsiighehtchic and its residents fairly deserve. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 834-20(1):
FERTILITY SUPPORTS

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During this Assembly and the 19th Assembly, Regular Members have been highlighting the need for fertility treatment supports for NWT residents. In the 19th, the idea of adding fertility treatments as an insured service was flatly denied. I have asked about this particular decision on insured services on the floor and done research behind the scenes. I have brought forward a petition with 368 signatures asking for the GNWT to investigate increased demand for fertility treatments and a tax credit to individuals pursuing those treatments. I've asked the Minister of Finance about why the GNWT doesn't offer these supports for their employees. And earlier this week, I tabled a jurisdictional scan of fertility supports offered by public governments across Canada.

Ultimately, the decision on insured services rests with the health Minister and her department. I recognize that the NWT health system is under fiscal strain, and so I am looking to find solutions that are fiscally prudent but still offer residents who are seeking fertility treatments some form of support.

The thing that baffles me most, Mr. Speaker, is the lack of data on how many residents need that support. I know there are many diagnoses that patients can get that explain their infertility, and tracking every single one in granular detail is not where I see the need. What we should be doing is tracking voluntary data from residents who are trying to conceive and cannot. Right now, it's word of mouth.

Advocates and residents come and speak to me about myriad reasons why the GNWT should support folks trying to start a family. Some of these reasons include preservation of fertility when you have a cancer diagnosis. Sometimes, a person with a uterus wants to start a family and finds out that they are struggling with fertility problems as well as finding donor sperm. I don't think the reason is key to track but rather the demand. Voluntary data can and should be collected from patients struggling to conceive for over a year so that the health system can make informed choices about fiscally prudent supports.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the Minister look to the Yukon, as my colleague from Frame Lake has suggested previously, and support our residents in

medical travel as interventions for fertility take place only south of 60. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 835-20(1):
POWER OUTAGE

MR. TESTART: That would be me. That was such a good statement from my colleagues, thank you; I was wrapped in awe.

Last night a nearly four-hour power outage during temperatures as low as minus 25 occurred occurring our proceedings in this chamber, Mr. Speaker, interrupting families just as they were sitting down to dinner and affecting restaurants and businesses just as they began serving their customers at peak hours.

I want to thank the Minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation for providing timely updates which were greatly appreciated by my constituents. I also want to thank NTPC and Naka Power technicians for working hard to bring our power grid back online, and the City of Yellowknife for operating emergency warming shelters and providing traffic control. But most of all, I want to thank residents of Yellowknife, Dettah, and N'dilo for their patience during yet another frustrating outage.

Power outages are no longer inconveniences, Mr. Speaker. They are occurring more frequently, up 30 percent on a five-year average, and are both serious financial drains on the economy while simultaneously posing a direct threat to the safety of homeowners. I've previously told this House about a family in my riding who suffered a catastrophic house fire due to a blackout and that a year later still have no home to call their own. Businesses have reported single incidents where power surges are or brownouts have caused thousands of dollars in damage to specialized kitchen equipment and POS systems. The Yellowknife chamber estimates that a full day outage affecting both power and communication lines results in the GDP loss of \$4.75 million. And another example in the South Slave region, a hand games tournament lost \$5,000 of food due to a prolonged outage with no backup refrigeration. And last year, a NACC performance meticulously planned was cancelled when the lights went out just before the doors opened.

While this Assembly had backup power, most homes and businesses do not. While we as Members were in a heated building with the

lights on eating our catered meal, many families did not have the power to cook food for their children.

Northerners want answers but more than that, they want meaningful solutions that reduce these outages and give confidence in our power system. They want to see a real plan, and they want to see it now. An hour's long power outage from the NWT capital on budget day, if this is not a fitting metaphor for how we're doing as a territory I don't know what is. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 836-20(1):
POWER OUTAGE

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When is enough enough? Last night the capital plunged into darkness for three and a half hours at minus 25. In the North, where would you ever deem power a luxury? It's the difference between a safe home and a public health emergency.

Mr. Speaker, when the lights go out at these temperatures, the clock isn't just ticking; it's counting down to a potential catastrophe. Yellowknifers are demanding explanation, reasons, why such failure happened. Mr. Speaker, was it an unforeseeable failure? Was it human error? Or was it just simply the system is buckling because of the weight of inefficiencies and the process and programs and equipment is just too old?

Mr. Speaker, I don't doubt for a moment that the crews on the ground were working as hard as they can, but I do doubt the plan, or lack thereof. It took nearly four hours to restore the power in this city, Mr. Speaker, life-threatening cold evening. Our contingency plans shouldn't be prayers. They should be printed on paper, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is well beyond an inconvenience. Failure has carried hidden costs, Mr. Speaker, we should speak about. You know, it doesn't show up on your utility bills, Mr. Speaker. It's a smack in the face of things like businesses who have to struggle day-to-day to get ahead. Fried equipment fries their POS and surges their power equipment, Mr. Speaker. Lost revenue and labour, as pointed out by my colleague from Range Lake, that the Yellowknife chamber has pointed out. Insurance nightmares of covering these things.

Mr. Speaker, if they're all deemed an act of God, what do we do? I call it a failure of service by the power corporation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we're all tired of the northern premium we pay for the highest power rates in the country, Mr. Speaker. But this situation is like we have a dialup on a fibre optics world.

Mr. Speaker, these inefficiencies need to be revisited. I am calling that the government create a business management and recovery fund. Mr. Speaker, it's a no hassle equipment replacement process, direct reimbursement for surge damage, Mr. Speaker. And I am also saying that we should have operation credits for losses created by these things over two hours during extreme weather, Mr. Speaker. The power corporation needs to take true responsibility because they are seriously mandated with our trusted responsibility and safety of Northerners. There's hybrid energy management solutions out there, Mr. Speaker, and as such we will talk more about that later. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 837-20(1):
LIQUID NATURAL GAS

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this House has heard me talk many times about what I call the good ol' days, and I refer back about 20 years ago in 2003 when the thought of the Mackenzie Valley pipeline was alive and well led by the aboriginal pipeline group which made up of 30 Indigenous community leaders. They've got a one third stake in that project. Inuvik was bustling. We had a petroleum show with seven, 800 members showing up there, and participants. And then alas, as I've said before, we took five years and our regulatory regime slowly choked the life out of that project, and it died. And in 2017, ABG was no more. But there is some hope, Mr. Speaker. We have seen the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation now developing their own natural gas well up there and will be providing energy to our region.

And, Mr. Speaker, I talked about the economy earlier on this week and how we need an economic engine. We do need drivers to keep our economy going. And I still think one of those drivers is the production and export of natural gas in the region. As we know, in 2021 there was a pre-feasibility study done by this government that said it was technically and financially feasible to do this work. So now I think we have a new leadership at IRC, they are doing their own work. I would hope that the

Minister is now reaching out to the new chair to now plan for a real and robust feasibility study around natural gas and it's production in the Beaufort Delta so we can truly see some economic stability in our territory. And I do believe that that could be the economic engine that pushes us forward as we see other industries obviously declining in our territory, Mr. Speaker. So I will have questions for the Minister of ITI later today on what we're doing to move this important project forward, whether we're seeking funding to get the robust feasibility study done, and where we are today with our natural gas. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 838-20(1):
HOUSING SHORTAGES

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the auditor general's report on housing in the Northwest Territories confirms what our communities have been saying for years, the system is broken. In the Tlicho region, this crisis is severe. Overcrowding is rampant and it is not just uncomfortable; it is harming our children's education and increasing the number of children in care. It also contributes to illness, mental health challenges, family violence, and wear and tear on homes creating unsafe conditions and costly emergency repair. These pressures ripple through the community, increasing homelessness, reducing employment stability, and deepening poverty.

This is not just a housing issue, Mr. Speaker. It is a public health and social crisis. Instead of building new homes where they are needed, the Government of the Northwest Territories continues to move families from Behchoko to Yellowknife. This is not a solution, Mr. Speaker. It uproots families, disconnect them from their culture and support systems, and leaves the housing shortage unresolved. Even the Government of the Northwest Territories homeownership program, designed to help, often hinders success. While it offers forgivable loans or lease to own arrangements, many homes are older and require costly repairs. Participants, including elders and low income families, must cover maintenance and utilities without support. For households already struggling, these obligations can lead to unsafe living conditions, mounting debts, and even loss of the home. Instead of creating a pathway to security, the program risks setting people up for failure.

Mr. Speaker, without safe and adequate homes, our community cannot thrive. This

government must act now, build quality homes in Tlicho communities, review the homeownership programs, and create policy that support success, not hardship. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 839-20(1):
UPHOLDING THE TREATY RIGHT TO
HEALTHCARE SERVICES

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I talked about treaties yesterday, and that was Treaty 8, and it talks about health care that's in the Canadian constitution that talks about the Crown consultation, accommodation, and that kind of thing. But, Mr. Speaker, if I were to assign grades to this Cabinet, this would be based on simple measures of each Minister upholding treaties by delivering the best possible service to our Indigenous communities, I know the Minister of Health and Social Services would have agreed with that standard during our leadership committee two years ago when she emphasized that medical travel process should reduce stress, not add to it, yet actions speak louder than words. Since her evaluation to Cabinet, my constituents continue to reach out in a high stress situation where medical travel's making an emergency harder. Harder, not easier. And the Minister has not worked out with us to provide solutions rather than obstacles. That is why I am deeply disappointed in the growing gap between what our communities need and what the Minister's medical travel modern project -- sorry, modernization project is actually delivering. We are long overdue for policy flexibility and a contingency fund to support people while they await NIHB approval.

Instead, modernization is being framed around bureaucratic slogans like clarity and navigation where the urgent needs of residents remain unmet. What that tells me is that Ministers just working on modern process to continue denying my constituents support and care they need.

I remind the Minister that UNDRIP, which is tasked with implementing and confirming Indigenous people's rights to the highest attainable standards in physical and mental health. Article 24 is clear. Indigenous people have the right to access all social and health services without discrimination yet, geographically, services qualified financial means to continue to act for barriers and people's health care.

We have two years left in this term. I ask the Premier what is the consequences when the mandate letter goes unfulfilled? Mr. Speaker, I would have questions for the Minister at the appropriate time. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 840-20(1):
CELEBRATING GRANDCHILDREN

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Colleagues, I want to share a personal story from Wednesday, December 17, 2025. Five of my seven children were home in Fort Simpson for the week before Christmas. My daughter Jenny asked if we could all go out for lunch at the Pandaville. After a few questions, I agreed, and fifteen of us invaded the restaurant. After a wonderful meal and conversation, two plates of fortune cookies arrived. I opened mine first. It said something about a small, sweet thing that would steal my heart soon. I didn't think much of it. Then Grace opened hers and started to cry. She shared it with me: Get ready to spoil a new little one, baby Stroeder 2026.

This exciting news brought tears to the table, and it marks Grace's and mine 11th grandchild: Mason, Jacob, Paige, Brady, Scott, Logan, Adele, Ezra, Aurelia, Rhett, and now this new baby in 2026.

This moment made me reflect on the profound importance of grandchildren and how lucky we are. Today, I rise for a Member's statement on this gift.

Our grandchildren bring profound joy and purpose, weaving three generations together with love, wisdom, and unbreakable bonds that draw families closer. This remind us of life's renewal, letting us pass on our experiences while witnessing theirs unfold. I love the fact that our grandchildren offer unconditional love that boosts our emotional well-being and reduces loneliness. We see them build self-esteem, resilience, and a safe space to confide their challenges.

As grandparents, along with their parents, we instill values, share family stories, and pass down cultural heritage, sharing their identity and moral compass. In turn, our grandchildren keep us active, sharing fresh perspectives that sharpen our minds and extend our vitality. I have heard other grandparents' joke, If we'd known how much fun grandchildren are, we'd have had them first. I've come to realize our children gave us the joy of grandparenting through the adventures they took us on.

In closing, I thank my children for these amazing gifts and look forward to many more. As I told Grace, we're now into double digits now so we can look for another eight or more.

Members' statements. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Well, I just did my Member's statement. I have my youngest daughter and her family here, the three youngest grandchildren, Rhett, Roy or Billy, depending on what he wants to be called, Aurelia who is known as Hammy, and Ezra, who are the youngest grandchildren but will be replaced in June to be the next. So welcome to the Assembly. And my son-in-law Brendan. Thank you very much for attending, and I'll get to watch hockey this weekend with them. So welcome to the Assembly.

Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Kam Lake.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to welcome to the gallery Fort Simpson teacher Jackie Whellie. This week we also celebrated National Women and Girls in Sport Week, and Jackie is a very active futsal and soccer coach and does a lot for kids in the community, so huge thank you to her.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First I'll acknowledge the group as a whole sitting in the gallery, the NUP delegation of the Yellowknife Community Services Corp. Mr. Speaker, in particular, saving the best for last of course, no offence to the first one, I'd like to recognize Stewart Olden, a friend for a long time. Ann Peters is on the board. Lloyd Henderson who's been a family friend for I'd say a generation. And my favourite constituent, I could spend ten Member's statements just doing the introduction of the gold standard senior Vivian Squires who means so much to me and many people in this community. Thank you so much.

MR. SPEAKER: Recognition of visitors in the gallery. If we missed anyone in the gallery today, welcome to your chambers. Again, thank you very much for allowing us 19 to represent you for these past two years and continue to represent you for the remaining two years. I hope you enjoy the proceedings. It is always nice to see people in the gallery.

Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Replies to the budget address, day 2 of 7. Member from the Sahtu.

Replies to the Budget Address

REPLY 23-20(1):

REPLY BY MR. MCNEELY

MR. MCNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I will not be in the chamber next week, I took the opportunity of sharing my reply to the budget. But from yesterday's three presentations by my colleagues, I couldn't have said it any better so I will echo their replies in addition to emphasize our declining economy. To some degree, the level, and as mentioned by our business Minister this morning, the North needs capital. We've already seen that. So it's inspiring to see the defense spending allocated for the North in the billions of dollars. That is going to be welcoming news to our commerce community. And I see a need similar to my declining economy with the closure of the Norman Wells production oil field. In this community, we have the declining closure of the diamond clients. So I would emphasize in deliverance of the budget allowance for readiness, marketing of the opportunities to come.

A good example to do that is to have a town hall in our Great Hall. That would inspire and have an open door policy to the invited guests of our commerce community to share what's coming. I can't wait for that day when the Mackenzie Valley Highway is not only a contributor to this territory but a contributor in a number of benefactor ways, taking the bondage of isolation on the communities down the Valley. You put that into perspective, it will bring nothing but prosperity to the income support clients, to our residents. Now you've got productive choices. You can take your U-haul and go to Grand Prairie and load it up with affordable groceries.

As one colleague said, as a senior, seasoned Member of this Assembly, I've never seen our North in a desperate state as I see it today. Some areas are a little bit lower than others, but we have the final negotiations to design this budget to reflect what we need, and I look forward to those deliberations. But making allowance to sustain today's society which is plagued by so many problems that spin off and create poverty and mental stress on our residents. Gee, I really want to afford Christmas presents, I heard a number of times, but I don't have the money for my children. Now that brings stress to the father and mother of that home.

Those are examples we hear out in the small communities, Mr. Speaker. And now I think this year is a welcoming year for prosperity. We've just got to showcase that and design our budget to reflect and giving allowances to have revitalization workshops in the Sahtu, in other parts of the region, sharing what our government is doing to the people of the Deh Cho. So we take our message to the communities.

As our chair of the AOC mentioned, we are resource rich and cash poor. There's a cry for critical minerals. Why aren't we looking at reforming our regulatory process to streamline that and make it better? Yes, I agree, our Resource Management Act is underway with finalization of the regulations. But could it be speeded up? You ask those questions of progress and progress to achieve our mandate, execute more importantly these projects. And these projects will justify the Minister of ITI's statement earlier, the North needs capital. We need capital, and we need to execute that capital to build infrastructure.

As I mentioned in my statement, the best social program is a job. Now that job income is going to build and eliminate mental stress to the family in isolation. Repeatedly, we've talked about the cost of living in the Northwest Territories. Yes, there's solutions to that. Let's take isolation and throw it away and replace it with affordable access, and affordable access will attract investment. Resource development will escalate.

So, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to take too much of the time other than what's been said. I totally agree, but I just emphasize to the 20th Assembly, for the latter half of our term we need to make decisions and set deadlines to achieve that schedule that's going to create capital to the North. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Replies to the Commissioner's Address, day 2 of 7. Member from Yellowknife North.

REPLY 24-20(1):

REPLY BY MS. MORGAN

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we heard several speeches yesterday about this budget. Even though there were some notable contrasts amongst the speeches, there were also some common themes that I agree with, that the North faces both great challenge and great opportunity at this moment in history and that we must take more decisive action quickly and build momentum by strengthening our economic and social foundations. However, I also heard a theory that I vehemently disagree with, the theory that

the main thing holding us back as a territory is the, quote, tail wagging the dog, that our Cabinet Members are being led blindly by a powerful group of bureaucrats behind the scenes who are actively resisting any real change. These, and I quote, well-connected insiders who live fat off government procurement instead of innovating their own businesses.

Now, I understand that many people looking from the outside, who are not part of government decision-making, perceive that the tail is wagging the dog. They're frustrated that they so rarely see any dramatic change in direction. They're frustrated that things seem so slow. So tail wags the dog is the best explanation that they can come up with.

What I find puzzling is when people who are not on the outside looking in still reach for the same simplistic and false explanation, people who are decision makers, people who are leaders with access to extraordinary amounts of information and an extraordinary level of input into the decisions and overall direction of this government. I am not just puzzled but alarmed when these leaders scapegoat public servants and paint them all with the same brush.

Point of Order

MR. TESTART: Point of order. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Member appears to be given a reply to my budget address and in doing so is making allegations or accusing me of making allegations against public servants and undermining confidence in government, etcetera, etcetera. My words speak for themselves, Mr. Speaker. They were put in context. And, again, this is a reply to the budget address, not a reply to my address, and I have not heard that from the Member so far. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the purpose of our work here in this House is to respond to the discussion and deliberations that is happening amongst all of us, and I have not referred to anything that -- I don't believe I referred to anything falsely in terms of things that were not said. So I believe that this is all relevant in terms of responding to the budget address. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. I don't see a point of order; however, I was going to do this on Tuesday, but I am going to do it today: Let's focus on the budget, let's focus on what we're trying to achieve here. People are getting close to that line, and we could be moving over that

line, which I don't want to be the parent, the coach, the referee, that has to address it all the time. So please, let's be very respectful of each other, please reply to the budget, and let's move forward.

Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Mr. Speaker, I am not here to defend government, and I am not here to defend Cabinet. What I am defending, unapologetically, is public servants. I would never pretend that the GNWT is a model of a well-functioning institution.

My first job when I moved here almost 18 years ago was with the GNWT, and I found myself in a little unit that was such a terrifyingly dysfunctional place that I quit after only a few months. And I never went back. I swore I did not want to work for government. But I did fall in love with this place and especially its people. This community and communities across the NWT are made up, in large part, with government workers, everyone from renewable resource officers to nurses to teachers, and yes, even the policy makers and program staff in departmental offices that we are funding through this budget all play a necessary part in keeping this territory running and putting all the supports and services in place that most of us take for granted every day.

Look, so government often moves slowly. We heard a lot about that yesterday. We all know that, and we agree it's not good. But to change it, we first need to be clear about why it moves slowly.

As far as I can tell, it's not because there is any conspiracy. It's because decision makers tend to be really bad at reaching agreement amongst ourselves on the right path forward. Sometimes leaders even think it's supposed to be that way, that the right way to be a leader is always to be angry and disagree with anything the other side says. And then if those types of leaders are quick to get really mad when a bold decision is taken they disagree with, Ministers and public servants alike, especially those on the front lines, feel vulnerable to shaming and blaming while trying to implement something that some folks don't like. So the constant incentive is for government to not do anything different, out of fear. If leaders cannot agree on what to do, the safest option always appears to be don't rock the boat, don't do anything too different that you could get blamed for.

Mr. Speaker, this budget, it moves away from the primary objective of fiscal restraint and towards a focus on shifting resources towards things that will shore up our foundations and prepare us for a possible big influx of federal

investment around northern security. So I think that has broad consensus. And when you zoom out, it becomes obvious, though, that the actual amount of resources being shifted around towards our priorities is relatively minor; however, there are some notable initiatives that in themselves will make a big difference, and I want to point those out.

I think that the plan to expand lab and diagnostic services at Stanton to a 24/7 model will make a huge difference both to patients and to the efficiency and effectiveness of our healthcare system. I am pleased to see that significant new resources are being allocated to transitional and supportive housing projects as well as towards the stabilization of emergency shelters across the territory.

But as a group, we have struggled to come up with a common idea of the changes that we actually want to see in this particular budget or any GNWT budget. My main objectives are not related to any specific budget line but require achieving a clear vision for how we're going to build a stable and well-supported healthcare workforce and identifying concrete things that are holding us back from building a robust labour force, including basic education and literacy.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I will continue to emphasize the need to have the tough conversations amongst us leaders that could actually lead to consensus on a bold path forward rather than focusing on the divisions because I believe that that is the most significant thing holding us back, that if we can address it we can allow this government to make more progress faster. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Replies to the budget address, day 2 of 7. Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member from Frame Lake.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 952-20(1): NORTH SLAVE POWER GRID MODERNIZATION

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister for the power corp. Mr. Speaker, what has the Minister and power corp been doing to stabilize our power system and possibly even reduce power rates north of the lake? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Minister responsible for NTPC.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I know that the Member is implying something other than talking about Taltson, but I can't emphasize enough that not being connected to the North American energy grid, not having our grids connected, leaves us very vulnerable. And so we wind up having outages more frequently when there's only one line that runs to a single generating source -- a single hydro generating source. Typically, we'd be able to bring the diesel back online but if that doesn't happen quickly, we wind up in the situation we found ourselves in yesterday.

So, Mr. Speaker, some of the things that we are doing, and one in particular, was with respect to past -- this past spring when we issued a whole list of directives out to the public utilities board, that included with the integrated systems planning. The fact that we don't have integrated systems planning in the North, in my mind, is very urgent. I am always happy to speak about this. It is a serious issue that, as I understand it, lingered for a decade before we got this out to the public utilities board to action. And I know they are actioning it. I've been checking back in with colleagues, with my colleague for the public utilities board, and this is moving forward so that engagements are happening right now on all of those directives, including this one. We need to have an integrated plan that looks at our entire system and what we're going to do to make it better. Thank you.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate the Minister's points there. I guess where I was trying to go with this was just ensuring that our infrastructure investment is not just focusing on this southern grid tie-in because it's such a big project, and it's got -- it requires so much funding. I am just wondering are we focusing on smaller solutions as well? So infrastructure investment north of the lake, policy, or legislative change. As I said in my statement, Mr. Speaker, let's pull out all the stops and focus on what we can do to help reduce power rates in the NWT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my struggle is I am not going to be able to keep this down into the short answers that I know you're looking from us. So I -- my first comment would be this may be an appropriate topic to have a public briefing on. There is a lot to be said. Another thing happening on the Snare -- on the north side of the lake is a Snare grid modernization project. Again, could have happened years ago. It's happening now. We need to get to a place where a grid system and a generating system that was built in the '70s is modernized, that the transmission lines are brought up to speed, that

it is -- that we don't need to question whether or not, you know, something is out of date or old, that it's new, that it's modern. And frankly, the announcements that we're seeing about potential procurements coming in from DND is an opportunity. They would be a big customer for the power. That can then as an industrial customer allow us to do the investments that don't have to go on ratepayers. So, again, a lot is happening right in this moment but that grid modernization could well put us into a position that -- and would also better integrate renewables into the system, alternative renewals beyond the hydro system, add to the grid and bring some stabilities and some redundancy. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for NTPC. Final supplementary. Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I appreciate the Minister's answer there, and I certainly hope in our federal engagement on military investment, we're raising our power infrastructure as a concern.

Mr. Speaker, does the Minister have any idea for us what kind of timeline we can expect this North Slave grid modernization to take place. So when can residents expect to start seeing those improvements come online and help stabilize our system? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's -- the challenge we find ourselves in is wanting to ensure we do good planning, so the integrated systems planning that's being led across the territory by the public utilities board, the Snare grid modernization which is focused here, and doing that at the same time that there is also a five-year capital plan for Northwest Territories Power Corporation. So we need to keep upgrading the systems immediately. We also do want to be doing this in the context of having a plan. So there is a five-year plan that is rolling out. There are improvements that are taking place every year, and we see them during the capital planning process here. But at the same time wanting to make sure that we do that as we're building out this plan. So those changes are happening already. There are -- again, I don't have -- and I don't have the capital plan in front of me, Mr. Speaker, but there -- that capital plan, as I said, it already has been put forward. I believe it's been tabled as a document as it does get every year, and I'd be happy to provide an update, perhaps, as to what has happened in the last capital planning year and what is upcoming for this year. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for NTPC. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 953-20(1):
POWER OUTAGE IN YELLOWKNIFE

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there was a nearly four-hour blackout yesterday in the city of Yellowknife. The Minister's well aware. She was -- and very thankful to have her engagement and receive updates from her through that. Can the Minister just speak to -- clearly to the citizens of Yellowknife, Dettah, and N'dilo, what happened to cause the power outage and how was it resolved? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Minister responsible for NTPC.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, again, I'll just -- I'll put it back the other direction, that it is helpful when people are getting information out to the public. I would always direct people back to NTPC's Facebook page, if they're on social media that is the first point of call. But everyone that was participating -- and that makes it easier for residents to know where to look, where to find information. So that is helpful that we're all out there.

Mr. Speaker, we ultimately were able to identify that this was an issue at the Jackfish substation. And they were -- the crews that were out there were trying to get the system back online using both hydro and diesel. The challenges, and where typically our power outages get resolved fairly quickly, because we can go from hydro to diesel, in this case it was difficult to get the diesel units up and going, and that led to further delays. Eventually, they got the Bluefish back online. But there does take some time to go from where the staff are stationed out to Bluefish. So between all of those things and different efforts, it took longer than has been typical for us. The first customers got their power back around 8:20, and the later customers by about 10:20. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker -- and thank you to the Minister for that and also updates from Naka Power and the City of Yellowknife were very helpful as well. So thank you to everyone who worked hard to get that information out to the public.

Are there not contingency or backup systems to prevent this kind of thing? I know this was a difficult technical issue to solve, but it seems like these -- when these -- many of these power outages are getting longer and longer to resolve. So are we looking at investing in more

contingency and backup so when these faults do occur, they're shorter, they're resolved quicker, and they bear less costs to citizens and businesses. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, having access to a diesel generating facility and hydro does create generally a redundancy for the city of Yellowknife. And as such, Yellowknife, in general -- certainly last year, last calendar year -- although we had more frequent outages than other parts of Canada, we actually were well under the average in terms of our restoration time. Obviously last night was certainly an exception to that. And as I just mentioned in my previous response, Mr. Speaker, part of the problem there was because we couldn't get what is the typical backup diesel to be up and running as it was expected to. So that is unusual circumstance. I mean, there's certainly how many layers of backup to backup are necessary. If there was a grid connection that provided a redundant system, then you can move power more seamlessly between the different grids. We don't have that here. And in the interim, Mr. Speaker, we certainly want to make sure that the systems that we have, both the hydro and the diesel, are up functioning and as modernized and as up to speed as they can be. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I mean, I guess if we're pretty good at getting it back on, then we need to prevent the frequency of them. So that's the million-dollar question, probably the billion or even trillion-dollar question. So how much is it going to cost to fix this and when is it going to happen? Because Northerners cannot keep living through this. I can't tell you how many messages I received of people saying enough is enough, I am looking to leave the North. And not just tonight, but for many -- over the months leading up to this session, it's getting unbearable, and we need something, and the solutions need to come now, and there needs to be a plan, and there needs to be progress. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I agree that for the course of maybe 20, 30 years, there ought to have been integrated systems planning, a Snare resiliency study done, and a connection of our grids. In the absence of that, Mr. Speaker, we are now trying to do all of those things at the same time in the course of this government so that we can deliver on the kind of plan and the kind of intentional plan that this

community and the whole of the Northwest Territories needs. We cannot afford as a territory to be behind. It is an issue that I raise frequently with federal counterparts from funding perspective. Interties are on the radar of the federal government. They need to come here and help support this. Because if you want to know the costs, we are in the hundreds of billions of dollars to replace the entire system. That's not reasonable. So what can we do in the meantime? We need to be doing as many things as we can. So a line out to Whati, a line around to Fort Providence, connections of the two grids, building in its systems planning, replacing battery systems, making them so you can integrate your renewables, making it so that you can integrate your home renewables, making it so that communities can have renewables. All of this needs to happen. As I say, Mr. Speaker, those things are moving forward. They are going to take some time, but they are moving forward now. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for NTPC. Oral questions. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

QUESTION 954-20(1):
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE INUVIALUIT
REGIONAL CORPORATION

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in my Member's statement, I talked about opportunities lost but that's in the past. Let's look at our bright future given the announcements of the infrastructure spending that's coming through DND. My question is for the Minister of ITI. Given, again, what I spoke about the work that's on going with the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation in the Beaufort Delta as well as the LNG we have up there, has the Minister and her department been in contact with the newly elected chair to discuss the ongoing projects that they're working on up there right now? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Minister for ITI.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Member also spoke about hope, and I share the same hope that he spoke about in his Member's statement and that desire to see strong economic engines for the Northwest Territories. I have a meeting with the new chair of the IRC this month. Thank you.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you, that's excellent news. Sooner rather than later, I would hope.

Can the Minister commit in that meeting -- and I spoke about now is the time to do an actual robust feasibility study. I understand there's likely funding out there for that so we can likely get that either funded through like an organization like CanNor or the major infrastructure projects office to get now, obviously led by IRC to engage -- when she engages with the chair of IRC to talk about the potential of a feasibility study, a robust feasibility study. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Member that I have not stopped talking about the Mackenzie Delta LNG opportunity. I've talked to federal Ministers about it, Alberta Ministers about it. I've talked to the major projects office. I've talked to the Canada Infrastructure Bank. I've talked to businesses about it, ambassadors, Consul Generals. And so I am definitely along with some of my Cabinet colleagues consistently making sure people both have the pre-feasibility study and idea of the economic potential that exists there. Having those conversations alongside the chair of the IRC would be an incredible opportunity, and I very much look forward to having more conversations about that. Thank you.

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

MR. RODGERS: Thank you. And I expect no less, Mr. Speaker. And it's really good news. I just -- I didn't if I got -- she mentioned a pre-feasibility study. But my question was is she willing to look to do -- this government to do a -- in partnership with IRC, a full, robust feasibility study on the heels of that 2021 study. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much. So, Mr. Speaker, all of the entities that I've mentioned are ways that I am looking to work together to have that funded. We would also need to make sure that we're doing this work in concert, not just with IRC but also working with the significant license holders of that region of which there are five. And so continuing those conversations to pursue that feasibility study is what I am trying to get done here. That is the next step that we need to tackle to make this idea, this opportunity, a reality. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 955-20(1):
FIRST NATIONS AND INUIT POLICING
PROGRAM

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the First Nations and Inuit policing program being implemented and seen as a success within other communities within the NWT, will the Minister of Justice look at implementing this program in the community of Tsiigehtchic in the near and foreseeable future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, currently, there are -- the FNIPP program has 22 members that we've added in the Northwest Territories, and five of those members are stationed within the Beaufort Delta, one specifically in McPherson that does support the community of Tsiigehtchic. Currently, there are conversations going on with Public Service Canada. There are community tripartite agreements that help to guide the work with all of the communities across the NWT. There are also 33 agreements that have been signed to work on a collaborative approach to how the FNIPP program will be delivered across the territory. So that work continues, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not what I was looking for, but. Okay, for the immediate future, the community identified that they do have a residence where the RCMP can stay for an extended period of time. Will the Minister look at having the RCMP members from the Fort McPherson detachment conduct prolonged stays within the community of Tsiigehtchic for their safety. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a couple of points to raise here. I think the day-to-day operation within the G-division of the RCMP is at the sole discretion of G-division. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, the 33 agreements that were signed with the communities also help to guide how that participation happens within those communities. So specifically for Tsiigehtchic, between January and October of 2025, there were 39 visits to the community as established patrols which were -- I don't have the specifics of the time of -- that they were actually in the community but there were 33 instances. A couple other sort of areas of interest here I think is that there were -- across the NWT there were 3,000 positive proactive patrols to communities that currently do not have detachments. So I think that's a positive number. And that the engagement within the communities is certainly part of that agreement process and having the communities be more directly engaged into how those policing priorities are determined

within each of those communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These agreements are all good but being implemented is another thing. The community of Tsiigehtchic is holding meetings on their safety. They want to know what can be done. They're trying to work with each other to see how they can make this happen. Will the Minister commit to visiting the community of Tsiigehtchic and answer questions on the status quo decisions for a permanent RCMP presence within their community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to commit to visit the community of Tsiigehtchic to meet with the residents and the Member to discuss the policing challenges that they're facing. It would be my great honour. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 956-20(1):
SUPPORTS FOR FERTILITY TREATMENTS

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of health.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister has previously replied to a written question that the health services administration office will address patient files through a process called prior approval when the patient's cause of infertility is not readily known. This seems like a good touch point to capture voluntary data from residents who are struggling to conceive. So my question is can the Minister investigate that touch point, and any others that may make sense to her and her department, as a place to start collecting voluntary resident data to identify -- to start to identify the need -- the extent of the need -- pardon, for fertility supports in the NWT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at this time health and social services does not explicitly track that data, however, we are anticipating -- you know, and I think this is one of the areas that we struggle with within our system is that we're not able to pull that data, and we're hoping that -- well, you know, with the new electronic

health record, that is an item that's been designated that needs to happen, is to be able to extract data from the electronic health medical records. So until that happens, then we'll be able to better track different types of data within our health system. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. REID: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that. It gives me all the more reason to ask for questions about electronic health records.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of health tell me if her department is studying the Yukon's approach to medical travel supports for NWT residents seeking fertility treatment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at this time we are not contemplating that. The reason what we're doing right now is we are -- we are doing a system review of a lot of our health services and our insured services, our non-insured services that we are providing through the health sustainability unit, and so we need to complete that task before we decide to -- you know, to implement new services. Right now, the health and social services every year has a deficit and so trying to review and implement something new at this time is not something that we are looking at. However, we do provide medical travel. And I think I've mentioned this before, that we do provide the medical travel when it covers the insured services, like the diagnostics that need to happen that may be causing the infertility. And if there's insured services, if there's procedures that they may have that might be caused by this; however, it doesn't cover the treatments themselves at this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. REID: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, yeah, I recognize going down the road of trying to capture all fertility interventions as insured services is not one that the health Minister is willing to do at this juncture. So I guess I am just asking her to be bold and in her process can she identify the potential costs for providing medical travel for a non-insured service and if that is, indeed, something that she will be looking at. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, you know, and I appreciate the questions on these, and I -- I do have a running list of things that I -- I have that I would really like to look into and to add to our system; however, the things that we are currently

providing we do not even -- in some of the areas that we're providing them, we do not have the right amount of funding to do those programs as it is. And I know that this is important to many residents in the Northwest Territories and, like I said, I have a list of things that I would like to be able to bring forward; however, at this time, you know, all I can commit to is adding this to that list and making sure that it's on that list and that the department is aware that as we finish the health sustainability work and we look at how we're funding our programs and services and what programs and services that are important to the residents of the Northwest Territories that we can take a look at, you know, the other lists that the residents need. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 957-20(1):
HOUSING SHORTAGE IN THE TLICHO
REGION

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for housing. Mr. Speaker, GNWT received various auditor general's reports, education, social program, and housing all gave a failing grade. With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, Tlicho region is in housing crisis with severe overcrowding in Tlicho communities. What immediate steps is the Minister of Housing NWT taking to build new houses in the Tlicho region rather than relocating families to Yellowknife. Thank you.

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

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for the question. I think in terms of housing in Northwest Territories, again the concern in the Tlicho region is a concern throughout the Northwest Territories. We have 32 communities that we're providing housing for, public and social housing. We have over, like almost 3,000 units that we're providing supports to. With \$150 million investment over the next couple of years, we're going to have a significant new build throughout the Northwest Territories and also mentioned in the capital statement we are repairing over 600 homes throughout. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am aware in all the NWT but the auditor general's report did mention Tlicho region with the highest need. We're in housing crisis. I am going based on the report that's before us.

So with that in mind, Mr. Speaker, the homeownership program is intended to help residents achieve stability yet many homes are in poor conditions and require costly repairs that low income families cannot afford. What changes will the Minister make to ensure this program supports success instead of setting people up for failure. Thank you.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an important program. We provide \$10 million a year throughout the Northwest Territories for home repairs, seniors home repair, senior aging in place, emergency home repair. And, again, this is a program that's fully subscribed. With the auditor general's report and the notes in the auditor general's report, the recommendations with the report, I've asked Housing Northwest Territories to do a fulsome review of the homeownership program to see what we can do and how we can deliver this better because within the report, it talks about some caution and recommendations and some services that we need to do better. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Housing NWT. Final supplementary. Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the auditor general's report shows that housing issues have persisted for over a decade with little progress. How will the Minister ensure accountability and deliver a clear, measurable plan to address overcrowding, improve housing quality, and prevent this crisis from continuing for another generation. Thank you.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Work that Housing Northwest Territories is doing at this time, again like I mentioned a fulsome review, but we also need to look at all the programs we're offering in the Northwest Territories, in our communities, and with our local housing organization who are integral to housing in the community. So we need to provide them updated systems, more training, more monitoring, how are we allocating units, how are we working with the tenants to make sure that we have tenant succession plans in place, the work we're doing with our territorial housing needs assessment. Because we need to base this on data and statistics and also visits into the community to see the housing conditions ourselves. These are really important tools that we need to put in place. But there's an opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have proposal that will go in with Build Canada Homes. And that's probably a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with the federal government, and it could change housing in the

Northwest Territories. We could add more units, and we also could repair what we have. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 958-20(1):
SUPPORTS FOLLOWING POWER
OUTAGES

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions will be directed to the Minister responsible for the power corp. Does the Minister acknowledge that the three-and-a-half hour power outage at minus 25 poses a serious risk, an impact on families, public safety, and businesses? And if she does recognize this is a serious issue that has serious impacts, can she be specific as to what she's directing the power corp to do to mitigate these risks and impacts? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Minister responsible for NTPC.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in response to the power outage last night, we will be doing a follow-up to review the outage events. There was a couple of different -- as I already detailed this morning, there's been a couple of different events that led to the extended period of time of the outage, one being that the hydro plant couldn't just have backup diesel relied upon. The backup diesel units didn't start as expected, and then the time that it took to get the hydro back up. So as I said, we'll be doing a follow-up to review that, what took place at all those junctures, whether there are other processes that can be put in place, whether there are other pieces of equipment that could be available. Some things -- you know, like, the time it takes to get to the facility can't be varied. But the things that can be varied and are under our control will be reviewed so that we can ensure that similar things don't happen again. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the system is supposed to be uninterruptible and although we know that that's worth what it's worth, that statement, that said it's not meant to be three and a half hours to four hours.

Mr. Speaker, I proposed in my Member's statement today creating a business mitigation and recovery fund that would help businesses who are stung hardly on these initiatives -- it affects fried equipment, lost revenue, and insurance nightmares -- with some solutions.

Would the Minister be willing to look at those solutions I've proposed? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are significant costs that can occur when there's an extended power outage. We certainly see that as I -- you know, certainly to businesses, to residents, but also the government sees those impacts as well, and government services and government buildings. So certainly well aware that they can have significant impacts.

Mr. Speaker, across Canada, public utilities often experience outages and, in fact, as I said earlier, our utility typically -- or is under the Canadian average for the amount of time it takes to get back online. Others typically experience far longer outages, some in fact for days if not weeks. And there are provisions within the approach of utilities not to provide any kind of compensation in those types of events. Typically, there may -- I shouldn't say typically. There may be occasions that insurance is available. Obviously not everyone can access it. So this isn't an area where governments would generally set up funds or provide public funds for those purposes. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for NTPC. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the corporation is the only game in town. So I'll give two clear -- we have the land titles system that has an assurance program. They're responsible in case there's a mistake in the system that has impacts. Mr. Speaker, the auto industry takes responsibility when something goes wrong and they try to make it right, Mr. Speaker. And lastly, Mr. Speaker, I am suggesting an insurance program of some sort that creates reimbursements for no -- for damaged equipment and operating loss credits of some form, Mr. Speaker. Would the Minister be able to look at these types of solutions to be innovative because the impacts of these power outages fry equipment and cause a lot of serious damage. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the long, creative list that was put there just now. I'll certainly -- I will certainly commit to going back and to ensuring that the folks at NTPC have a look at it and ensure there's nothing in there that I am not familiar with that could be made functional. But, again, Mr. Speaker, at this point there is a significant amount of work in this territory that needs to happen to modernize our grid, to modernize our system, to bring our facilities up to modern standards so that we can better

integrate renewables, have me resiliency, have more redundancy. That work is urgent. That work needs to get done. And at the moment, that is the focus of both our resource -- human resource efforts and our funds. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for NTPC. Oral questions. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

QUESTION 959-20(1):
TREATY RIGHTS TO HEALTHCARE
ACCESS

MR. EDJERICON: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last three days, I've been talking about the health of my constituency, and I get calls all along from the chiefs and the Metis leaders about their issues and community issues as well, so. And then what I thought about was, you know, we have our treaty right to health and we have UNDRIP legislation, and I am trying to figure a way as to how we can look for solutions to some of the problems we're having and, in particular, that NIHB is also a federal legislation. And the Government of Canada also has a fiduciary obligation to implement the treaties, and health is part of that. So the GNWT here, we also are the Crown. So my question would be to the Minister of health.

If medical travel modernization is focused on clarity, information, and navigation, is the Minister suggesting that the only problem with medical travel lies in residents' understanding of the policy rather in the policy themselves? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, within the Northwest Territories, all travel for medical is provided through many different insurances, and the way that we fund for First Nation and Inuit that don't have any other employer insurances is through the non-insured health benefits. Non-insured health benefits is the payer of last resort, which we administer through their policy. However, when we -- you know, I've heard on the floor now for a couple of days, you know, with specifics to providing healthcare services to Indigenous people, First Nation, and Inuit, we provide health services to the patient. We provide the medical travel for the patient through the medical travel policy that is created and it's a policy, a federal policy that we administer. We have to be able -- we follow their rules. We advocate for the changes. I as well as Indigenous leaders of the Council of Leaders have gone to Ottawa, have sat with the

Minister, and stressed our issues with this policy as well and asked them to modernize it for betterment of our residents of the Northwest Territories, to look at our demographics, to look at our geographics, and how we have to -- the complicated issues of moving people around. However, we never stop from allowing a medical travel patient -- the patient, I want to be clear -- to get and access care. Where my office gets many, many concerns and BFs and especially from, you know, the Member's raised from his riding, are when it relates to escorts. Escorts, under the medical travel policy, the NIHB policy, is very clear in the criteria of the escort criteria. But when it comes to medivacs and air ambulance and ground ambulance, there is no policy either within GNWT's medical travel policy or with the NIHB. And those are the things that we're doing through the medical travel modernization. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. EDJERICON: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am aware of the lobbying efforts that you've made with the Government of Canada. I know that the Tlicho and Deline were part of that delegation to advocate for NIHB. Maybe a different approach could be maybe we could do it again with all the chiefs together, and that way here it gives more weight to lobbying to support the changes we need.

But, Mr. Speaker, if cultural safety is also focused on medical travel modernization, does the Minister acknowledge that at the heart of cultural safety are the government's policies that provide Indigenous people with support when they require care in urgent situation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I as part of the Council of Leaders, Cabinet is part of Council of Leaders, I know that we are planning an upcoming -- you know, another fall meeting to go to Ottawa to lobby the -- with all of the Indigenous leaders as well as us, you know, and I -- you know, I -- I encourage the Member's leadership to attend that and advocate with me on these issues. However, right now, and to the comments that have been made about cultural -- and this is why I said it's within the medical modernization, we are completing phase one, and phase one was more of the logistical pieces, clarifying, making sure that we update in clear, plain language for residents and for staff, practitioners who are signing off on these medical travel referrals. The piece in the phase 2 we are looking at is expanding that escort criteria. But this is going to come with money. It's going to have -- it's going to need resources. So we have to make sure that we have to do it in the processes that we have in consensus government where we have to analyze it, we bring it to committee, we go

through Cabinet, and then we decide whether or not this is where we can allocate funds to. 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, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a couple days ago, I brought up the issue of constituents and elders taking it upon themselves to go south for treatment because we're understaffed and the doctors are all busy. If not, they're -- it's the time wait on these to get help for our people is really long. And then on top of that, we have gaps in our system that are prohibiting our young people that need help sitting on the sidelines until NIHB approvals are done. My question would be to the Minister.

Knowing all what we know now, is there any way where we could create a line item maybe to help in cases where on the weekend where we're waiting for approval for NIHB for patients, is there anything we could do there in collaboration and working together so that we don't leave anybody out, we don't leave people on the streets homeless, regardless how we look at it? But I think we could work together trying to figure that one out. That's what I would like to see. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when it comes to NIHB, that is not -- I guess where it is is when the patient needs services, there is no waiting for NIHB, whether it's after hours, weekends. The only time that there is is when it's an exception to what NIHB's escort criteria is. And so at this point right now, we already have a pocket of money that we don't -- we're overspending every year millions of dollars on medical travel. And you see it on the floor of the House every time we sit down that there's a supplementary appropriation for medical travel. It's because this area has been growing and growing and growing. The chronic diseases, the access to care, as the Member has stated, and this is why we've taken many different areas where we're trying to focus on bringing care closer to home. We've done the Deh Cho journey and we're working through that to look at how we provide care to communities without health centres, nursing staff in that community. We're looking at physicians, base care that are servicing, like in the Fort Good Hope pilot project. We are starting -- we are going to be doing more in medical travel in moving of patients in this next couple of months. There's so many things that we are behind the scenes that are focused on that as a Minister I -- you know, I could just be called the Minister of medical travel because

that is what I've been focusing on. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 960-20(1):
AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND NORTHERN
UNITED PLACE

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was mentioning in my statement, Northern United Place in Yellowknife has been able to sustain 125 affordable housing units for 50 years without government subsidies based on a model where various GNWT departments, and most recently Aurora College, has acted as the anchor commercial tenant. So my questions are for the Minister of housing.

Is the Housing NWT office, or is the Minister and her staff, aware of the value of Northern United Place as a major provider of affordable housing in Yellowknife and the potential consequences in terms of increased homelessness and pressure on government services if this business model collapsed? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes, Housing NWT is very much aware of the contribution of the Northern United Place providing affordable housing in Yellowknife. And we're very grateful for it. Housing NWT has a close working relationship with the NWT Community Services Corporation for many years, and Housing NWT has continued to meet periodically with NWT Community Services Corporation to discuss their planned upgrades to extend the service life of the Northern United Place building and realize added energy savings over the long term. There have been detailed discussions and have included commitments to support the corporation's renewal project. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So given discussions around a potential new campus for Aurora College in Yellowknife, is there a role for Housing NWT in brokering discussions between the NWT Community Services Corporation and other GNWT departments, or Aurora College, about being able to use that space as a new anchor tenant? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The space is currently not available,

and Aurora College currently has the lease, so no discussions have been committed at this time. Should this situation change, the GNWT would reassess whether discussions are needed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I certainly understand that. But certainly there would need to be time to make arrangements, and I am wondering if Housing NWT can get some -- try to get some commitment I guess from Aurora College in terms of giving a long heads up if they intend to relinquish that lease in order to leave many years' time to be able to negotiate or broker a new commercial tenant from a GNWT agency. So the question there is can Housing NWT broker some sort of commitment from Aurora College to give enough time to be able to make those arrangements? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, Mr. Speaker, we have a strong relationship, and this relationship is already established and working well. So senior officials from Housing NWT have held meetings and have been in regular conversation with the president on the Community Services Corporation's project. And we will continue to support the corporation as the details of their renewal project are solidified. It's important to note, however, that when decisions are made regarding the Aurora College, they will need to be redirected to the Minister responsible for Aurora College or any other responsible Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 961-20(1):
FUNDING PROGRAMS FOR BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today is a follow-up from my statement and directed to the Minister of ITI.

My first question there, Mr. Speaker, what programs does the Department of ITI have in preparation for the Mackenzie Valley Highway project in terms of a readiness? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Minister of ITI.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the programs within the GNWT extend beyond the

walls, so to say, of ITI. ITI has programs, for example, like its community futures program that issues different loan arrangements. It also has its SEED funding where you can have -- or apply for different levels of loans -- not loans, sorry, grants for governments -- or jeez, I am going to start over. I think it's -- it's Friday, Mr. Speaker. SEED funding, which is grants for businesses. They can either do things like upscale their business. They can expand their business. Because this is going to bring about new opportunities for business owners or people who want to get into self-employment or business operation. There's also Prosper NWT, Mr. Speaker, who has both supports for how to run your business, how to do your bookkeeping for your business, human resources supports, and also issues loans to businesses. I spoke about the increase in the loan limits today as well. And then there's also digital grants that are available if people want to start websites to be able to advise about their programming beyond those walls. ECE has funding specifically for workforce development, workforce expansion, training as well. And so there is a suite of programs that are available. Thank you.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the Minister for that basket of support programs to this huge project that is potentially coming. Aside from that readiness could be looking at the daycare needs of the community. And I've heard numerous times we need a daycare so that parents can go take advantage of the opportunities, which leads me to my next question there, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Minister of ITI hold readiness sessions to bring awareness and preparatory thoughts in the right-of-way communities? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I love this idea because it also allows people to share ideas. It also might mean partnerships even within the business community when people start sharing their ideas and what they're looking at doing. So I commit to taking this back to both ECE and ITI and seeing what can be done from our regional offices in order to support this and make sure people have access, one, to the information, but two, exploring how they can potentially bring different opportunities together. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of ITI. Final supplementary. Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the Minister for that information and the commitment.

My last question there, Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of ITI support a readiness working

group with the Indigenous governments so we can share preparatory measures? Mahsi.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Minister for Strategic Infrastructure, Energy, and Supply Chains, sits on a steering committee for the Mackenzie Valley Highway, and making sure that people are ready for this project is part of their conversations. I also understand that this month, the committee -- or sorry, the Minister's Department for Strategic Infrastructure, Energy, and Supply Chains will be doing their engagement plan to start working with Indigenous governments on what that readiness will look like, and so I can confirm to the Member that this work is underway and will begin this month along with Indigenous governments. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 962-20(1):
RADON TESTING IN PUBLIC HOUSING
UNITS

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have some questions for the Minister of housing today on radon as well.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister for housing outline when it started its radon testing program and in what communities and what mitigation efforts it has taken to date for public housing? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Minister responsible for Housing NWT.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Housing NWT began its current radon testing program in 2024 with discussion with the LHOs to identify units that would meet the criteria for potential radon exposure. Housing NWT continues to conduct radon tests for housing units that meet the applicable testing criteria for radon risk; for example, housing units with a basement or a sealed crawl space. To date, Housing NWT has completed radon testing in the following communities:

- Gameti,
- Lutselk'e,
- Whati,
- Yellowknife,
- N'dilo,
- Dettah,

- Norman Wells,
- Fort Smith, and
- Hay River.

70 of the 76 tests conducted to date had acceptable risk, and six of these tests have been retested.

For the six units being retested, LHO maintenance staff have inspected the six units to ensure there are no noticeable cracks, leaks, open sumps, and pipe ducting penetration. These units will be continue to be closely monitored while the retesting is being completed within the next three months. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I may be asking the Minister to talk about future planning, and maybe it's not fully addressed yet, but can the Minister explain if she has any steps should mitigation be required and how she will go about hiring contractors or if the LHOs will be the ones who take care of mitigation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Housing NWT has not had a need to date to contract external specialists to mitigate elevated radon in public housing units. Should external contractors be required, Housing NWT will adhere to the GNWT's procurement policies and secure services of contractors certified in this area.

As noted previously, Housing NWT has tested 76 units, and I am pleased 70 of the 76 conducted confirmed acceptable radon levels in these homes. This testing will involve all applicable units being operated within the public housing program, including both stick and modular. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Final supplementary. Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that. I already have a radon testing and mitigation specialist in my email inbox from my conversations with the Minister of MACA. So, Mr. Speaker, will the Minister discuss lessons learned with this project with Housing NWT with the Minister of MACA who can then share this information at the NWTAC bear pit and with LGANT? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, Housing NWT recognizes the importance of the continued radon testing for health and safety for our tenants. Housing NWT would be pleased to share best practices and

lessons learned with NWTAC and LGANT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 963-20(1):
OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS MORATORIUM

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Western Arctic Offshore Accord, which was signed on August 10th, 2023, by the Government of Canada, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, the Government of the Northwest Territories, and the Government of the Yukon, to establish a framework for the shared management and regulation of the offshore, can the Minister of ITI give us an update on the progress on this accord, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Minister of ITI.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, currently our government, along with the Government of Yukon, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, the federal government, are working on the legislation that will need to be tabled in the House of Commons as part of this project. Thank you.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, given the request to have the offshore moratorium lifted by our Premier, and certainly by IRC as well I understand, has there been a response -- in the Minister's conversations or discussions with industry, has there been any kind of an indication from them to that request? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's definitely questions being posed in looking for solutions as part of the potential lifting of the moratorium. One of the concerns that we have certainly heard is ensuring that fairness to exploration license holders is maintained and addressed in this process. There are a number of licenses that would be set to expire potentially right up against when the moratorium could be lifted. And so it would be essential to ensure that a solution is figured out before that happens. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member from Monfwi.

QUESTION 964-20(1):
INCOME THRESHOLDS FOR
HOMEOWNERSHIP INITIATIVE POLICY

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister responsible for Housing.

Mr. Speaker, I have constituents -- and it's not only in my region. It's in other regions as well -- that have recently been denied eligibility for the homeownership initiative program on the basis that they exceeded the core need income threshold. Why have these applicants been deemed ineligible for exceeding this threshold when the homeownership initiative policy makes no reference to this requirement? Thank you.

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

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Housing NWT offers an affordable housing program. So it's for those that can't get by without Housing NWT's support. So it's for low income affordable housing. And that includes our programs, Mr. Speaker. So we have a homeownership program with home repairs, and we have a public housing program. So the public housing program has its own core need income threshold, and the home repair program has its own home core need income threshold. And I know, for instance, with the home repair program with a core need income threshold, this is gross income between eight and \$10,000 a month. So, Mr. Speaker, I think that is being reviewed right now, but these are some of the examples of the home repair program core need income threshold. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Well, it's good the program is being reviewed, the policy is being reviewed, because it's the policy. I like the program. I understand about all the program that's available to help homeownership or to have more homeownership.

Given that the homeownership initiative policy is a policy that does not identify the core need income threshold as an eligibility requirement, what internal direction or guidance led to its use in assessing applicant eligibility? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, like, the home repair program has been with this government for over 30 years, but what we're doing now with the core need income threshold and the review of it, is we're looking at our market basket measure today, in 2026, versus the last update which was 2020-2021. So there's significant work done on the home repair program with the core need income threshold, but also with our

public housing program, with our core need income threshold, because sometimes over the last number of years, especially with COVID and especially with global events, cost of living has increased so much that people are trying to make ends meet, sometimes salaries don't go or match with the cost, CPI index. So looking at that and looking at the work, we're hoping to have something in my hand probably in March and in the House maybe in May for consideration. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am talking about the homeownership initiative program, the policy, not the repair program.

With that in mind, what steps will the Minister take to ensure that eligibility decisions for the homeownership initiative align with the written policy, and will previously denied applicants and/or applications be reviewed if they were screened using criteria not specified in the program policy? Thank you.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Housing does have an appeals process and we can always have a second look at applicants that are denied. And one thing we are doing with Housing NWT is normally the homeownership program is the regional centres or the capital, and housing is looking at applications outside regional centres and outside the capital. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. 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 Oral Question 766-20(1). This follow-up 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. Being respectful of the time, we will have a break right now.

---SHORT RECESS

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Written questions. Member from Yellowknife North.

Written Questions

WRITTEN QUESTION 26-20(1): APPLICATION OF WATERS ACT PROVISIONS TO THE SALE OR TRANSFER OF MINING ASSETS

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four written questions to submit. The first one, 26-20, Application of Waters Act Provisions to the Sale or Transfer of Mining Assets.

There is concern that the sale of mining assets to smaller operators may increase the risk of bankruptcy and unfunded remediation liabilities. The Waters Act contains provisions that allow for financial testing of new owners when licenses are assigned, but the Department of Environment and Climate Change has indicated through correspondence that the applicability of such testing depends on whether a transaction is structured as an asset purchase or a share purchase.

My questions are for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change:

1. What legislation, regulation, policy, or best practice supports the Department's stated position that the applicability of financial testing under the Waters Act depends on whether a transaction is structured as an asset purchase or a share purchase?
2. Can the Minister explain how Section 39 of the Waters Act is applied in cases where mining assets change ownership through a share purchase, including situations involving a change in controlling shares. And,
3. Can the Minister provide either publicly, or confidentially to Members, any existing analysis by the Department on how Section 39 of the Waters Act has been applied thus far to sales/transfers of mining assets, over the last ten years.

WRITTEN QUESTION 27-20(1): PHYSICIAN RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Secondly, Written Question 27-20, Physician Recruitment and Retention.

The recruitment and retention of physicians is one of the most significant challenges facing the Northwest Territories health system. Ensuring that the Government has capacity to recruit, orient, and retain physicians is essential to maintaining stable healthcare services across the territory.

My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services:

1. Would the Minister provide the number of positions within the Department of Health and Social Services and the health and social services authorities that are dedicated specifically to the recruitment and orientation of new physicians, as well as the retention of existing physicians?
2. What lessons were learned from the temporary physician bidding initiative used to fill shifts at Stanton Territorial Hospital, that will be incorporated into future efforts at recruitment and retention of both locums and contract physicians. And,
3. What recruitment and retention initiatives does the department or do health authorities have that specifically target physicians, and what measurable impacts have been observed to date as a result of these initiatives?

WRITTEN QUESTION 28-20(1):
MEDICAL TRAVEL

Third set, Written Question 28-20, Medical Travel.

Medical travel represents a significant and growing cost within the Northwest Territories health system, and its coordination involves multiple steps across regional medical travel offices, non-insured health benefits (NIHB) program approvals and referral processes administered by the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority (NTHSSA). Recent budget documents highlight substantial expenditures for medical travel, underscoring the importance of initiatives intended to improve efficiency and streamline referrals.

My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services:

1. Would the Minister provide a status report on the "referral coordination project" identified by the NTHSSA in its 2023 Deficit Reduction Plan as an initiative to improve the coordination of air ambulance and medical travel, including information on the project's objectives, timelines, activities undertaken, milestones achieved to date, and any measured impacts on service coordination and costs?

2. Can the Minister provide detailed policy rationale which links the outcomes of the referral coordination project to the proposal in the 2026-2027 Main Estimates for three new medical travel case managers, including how these positions will operationalize referral coordination, reduce duplication or rebooking, and improve patient experience. And,
3. What performance measures does the department use to assess the effectiveness of the referral coordination project and the proposed medical travel case manager positions? Specifically, what indicators are being tracked to evaluate outcomes?

WRITTEN QUESTION 29-20(1):
PARAMEDIC CONTRACTS

And finally, Written Question 29-20, paramedic contracts.

During the December 2, 2025, public briefing to the Standing Committee on Social Development on the Small Community Model of Care, the Minister of Health and Social Services indicated that paramedics who were on retainer contracts during the summer months to support wildfire fighting crews could be utilized to support small community health centre day-to-day operations.

My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services:

1. In recent wildfire seasons, what were the terms of the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) retainer contracts for paramedic teams supporting wildfire suppression efforts?
2. For each of those wildfire seasons, how many paramedics were committed to the GNWT under those retainer contracts?
3. Did the GNWT's retainer contracts for paramedic teams include provisions allowing the GNWT to assign the paramedics to other health-system duties when they were not required for wildfire support?
4. Has the GNWT or the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority tracked the proportion of retained paramedic resources that were utilized during wildfire seasons, including the percentage of total contracted personnel-hours that were

used for active service versus those retained but not deployed? And,

5. Have paramedic contracts for 2026 already been negotiated, and if so, are there any significant differences from previous years' contracts?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Member from Frame Lake.

Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills

BILL 26:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE PUBLIC SERVICE ACT

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your committee would like to report on its consideration of Bill 26, An Act to Amend the Public Service Act.

Bill 26 received second reading in the Legislative Assembly on May 26, 2025, and was referred to the Standing Committee on Government Operations for review. A motion extending the committee's review of Bill 26 by 120 days was adopted by the Assembly on October 20th, 2025.

MOTION TO EXTEND REVIEW PERIOD TO
NOVEMBER 12, 2026,
CARRIED

In accordance with its intention to wait for government legislation addressing the issues raised by Bill 26, the committee has not yet conducted a clause-by-clause review of the bill. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Rule 8.3(2) of the Rules of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories, I move, seconded by the Member for Great Slave, that the review period for Bill 26, An Act to Amend the Public Service Act, be extended to November 12th, 2026. Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

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

---Carried

Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Motions. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. Minister of Health and Social Services.

Notices of Motion for the First Reading of Bills

BILL 40:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE VITAL
STATISTICS ACT

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Tuesday, February 10th, 2026, I will present Bill 40, An Act to Amend the Vital Statistics Act, to be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

BILL 41:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE REAL ESTATE
AGENTS LICENSING ACT

HON. VINCE McKAY: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Tuesday, February 10th, 2026, I will present Bill 41, An Act to Amend the Real Estate Agents Licensing Act, to be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, Tabled Document 448-20(1), with the Member from the Sahtu in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Members, I will proceed in calling the committee to order. I now call the Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wishes of committee? To the Member Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the committee wishes to consider Tabled Document 448-20(1), 2026-2027 Main Estimates, Department of Health and Social Services. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member from Boot Lake. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you. Committee, we will proceed with the first item on the Department of Health and Social

Services today. And if we can move -- first of all, committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 448-20(1), 2026-2027 Main Estimates. We will now consider the Department of Health and Social Services. Does the Minister of Health and Social Services wish to bring witnesses into the House?

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. Committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

Would the Minister please introduce her witnesses.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To my left I have the deputy minister Mr. Alan Doody. And to my right, I have assistant deputy minister Jeannie Mathison.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. The committee has agreed to forego general comments. Does the committee agree to proceed to the detail contained in the tabled documents?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, committee. Committee, we will defer the department summary and review the estimates by activity summary beginning with administration and support services starting on page 197. So let's proceed to page 197, with information items on pages 199 and 200. Are there any questions?

Okay, thank you. Member of Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I am always interested in the electronic medical record project. I have some questions about that today. Can the Minister share what the timeline for implementation of the new electronic record system looks like, broadly speaking, as in when can -- where are we now and when can residents expect to have a new system in place. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member. Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll turn that over to deputy minister Mr. Doody.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. Deputy minister.

MR. ALAN DOODY: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you very much for the question. So we are currently completed the requirements portion of the project development, and we'll have to go to RFP sometime here shortly in the next coming months. And once we're through the RFP process, we'll be able to communicate a more finite timeline for the implementation of a new system.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, deputy minister. Back to the Member, Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So what I am hearing, then, is that there is no definitive timeline for the RFP. It's kind of coming up but we're not certain; is that correct, Mr. Chair? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member, Great Slave. Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes, that's correct. I believe the last update that we had was that it would be, I think within this next couple of months that it would be ready to go out for RFP. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. Member from Great Slave.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so the scope of this project, I believe, is quite extensive and daunting, and I would assume that there are few suppliers who could possibly meet the entire contents of that RFP. Does the Department or the Minister have a contemplation of how long it may take to find a successful applicant? Are there companies that they've identified that probably have the capabilities to do this work? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member. The deputy minister, please reply.

MR. ALAN DOODY: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you very much for the question. So across the country there's been several jurisdictions in Canada who recently have upgraded their EMR system. There's approximately three to four actual players that operate in that space, so we would assume that they will be one of the companies that would bid on our project. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, deputy minister. To the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you. And at this time I realize that we can't speak to the total dollar amount of the RFP, that sort of precludes contracting, procurement, etcetera. But how much is the

total cost of the planning work done thus far and the estimated general costs anticipated for this new system? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member. To the Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As that's part of capital, I don't have that level of detail right now, but we can get that information back to the Member.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I know part of the scoping of this project, too, is interoperability with the Alberta system. Has that pre-feasibility work been completed now that we're almost at the RFP stage? Is it realistic to assume that we will have interoperability with Alberta or other jurisdictions? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member. To the Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, right now, as across Canada, there is a working group, I believe, that is working together with Health Canada to -- I believe it's called Connect Care, and there's some legislation or work that -- I can turn it over to the deputy minister. He may have more details on that. But it's more to ensure that all of the jurisdictions in Canada are being able to connect with each other so through that process -- so I can turn it over to the deputy minister. He might have a few more details on that.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. To the deputy minister.

MR. ALAN DOODY: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the question. There is a national group working through Canada Infoway with PTs all participating right now on looking at technical standards to be able to share data across jurisdictions, and also CIHI are also engaged from the data side of that as well. So this is one of the items that's being worked at at the provincial/territorial level across the country.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, deputy minister. To the Member, Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am going to change my question topic. I am curious, when it comes to human resources, which is under this activity, will the department be working on a way to -- and it sort of dovetails with information services. Will the department be working on any way to publicly demonstrate,

either online or through communications, where they can show the vacancies and retention rates in specific healthcare fields in the territory? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member. To the Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There is, I guess, within human resources, depending on the jurisdiction, like if it's NTHSSA public service, that information, I believe, is tracked through finance's human resources, and it is published through their annual reports. So thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. To the Member of Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And that's where the tricky bit of NTHSSA and finance. Human resources and HR, human resources, always overlaps and I am always uncertain where the line is. So thank you to the Minister for that.

Can the Minister speak to some of the initiatives that are being considered to -- if there are any new initiatives being considered to increase the number of NWT residents working in health care? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member. To the Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I believe within our system, you know -- and I think that one of the pieces is that what -- under the health and social service portfolio, there are things that we have been doing and I think it's through the human resource plan -- the HR plan that health and social services is doing, and then there's the new work on the people strategy that is going to be -- being released publicly soon. And in those areas, it's focusing on with internally to supporting staff, making sure that -- you know, that there's new staff coming into the territory, that they're supported into their areas of work, that there's places that they're feeling that, you know, their voices are being heard. You know, we've heard -- but we've also heard from staff and through all of the reasons of staying in the North, they fall outside the jurisdiction of health and social services. And what I mean in there is a lot of things that came forward are housing and -- you know, and negotiations through, you know, bargaining and things like that, that health and social services doesn't lead on those areas. And so what we have done through the work that we're trying to create the people strategy is we want to make sure we honour that of what we've heard from staff that we are able to collaborate with our other Ministers' areas that address some of these areas. So I

think we've established a working -- like, there's work to establish, you know, working together to try and find ways to best respond to those concerns. And at this time, you know, I think that's where this new human resource plan for NTHSSA and the health authority is looking at that through the pillars of the areas that have been brought forward. However, you know, I think every area that is in that is going to, you know, take some time to address, and there's going to need to have resources with that. And this is where, you know, we struggle between ensuring that we have adequate resources to run the essential programs that we have while making sure that our staff are supported. So this work is ongoing. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Minister. To the Member of Great Slave, your time is up. Did you want to go back on the list for this activity.

MS. REID: [Indiscernible] but thank you. I am not certain --

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Okay, the chair will now recognize the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I wanted to start by asking about the overall net staff position changes for the department first.

So we see a net increase here of 18 new positions, but my understanding was that two positions were removed based on the sunset of a federal agreement that we would be hoping to renegotiate, the Canada-NWT Agreement to Work Together to Improve Health Care for Canadians. So that's the agreement with Health Canada. Can we expect, then, that the actual net addition will be 20 positions, or can the Minister comment on whether there's any positions that haven't been included here that we would expect to sort of put back in as soon as we can renegotiate the federal agreement? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member from Yellowknife North. To the Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll turn that over to ADM Mathison as keeping track of those numbers with the in and out, I'll confuse them for everybody. So I'll just turn it over to her.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister, please go ahead. Assistant deputy minister.

MS. JEANNIE MATHISON: Thank you, Madam Chair. So tracking of positions is extra complicated with our funding that we get

because a number of the positions that we do have in our budget are reflective of time-limited funding, so it comes in and out. So yes, there are 18 positions increased net in this budget for the department. 14 of those are specifically related to the northern Wellness Agreement, which we just renewed for a five-year period. And then there are other ones that are not in this budget that are expected to be added to the budget through the supplementary funding process and next year's budgeting process, shared health priorities being a significant one. That agreement is sunset something March 31st, 2026. And we're just in the stages of finalizing that extension to that agreement for the next few years. So those positions are not yet in here either.

The increase in positions that are not related to third party funded agreements are four, and those are related to funding we got for forced growth and new initiatives. So there's project management for a couple of the initiatives that we're doing that are time limited. So there's three positions that are time limited, and one additional position to fund the supports needed to -- for the 8-1-1 program. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so, I mean, the overall purpose of my questions here are just so we have a clear sense of how much the public service and our healthcare providers, how much the staff workforce is growing or not, like at an overall level. And so I wonder if I can also ask at this time about a similar question for the health and social services authorities. And so, similarly, my understanding is that there are federal agreements sunsetting that we expect to renegotiate, and my understanding was there's about 50 positions in the authorities that we expect to renegotiate and would hopefully be back in there. So even though we see only 13 new net positions showing up at the authorities, is the actual number that we can expect to see more like 63? I wonder if the Minister can comment on that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member Yellowknife North. Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: I'll just defer that to ADM Mathison.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Okay, thank you, Minister. Assistant deputy minister.

MS. JEANNIE MATHISON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, with agreements set to be signed for 2026-2027, we expect about 45 positions additionally to be added to the budget for the Working Together Shared Health Priorities Agreement, and we expect about another 53

positions related to the Home and Community Care federal agreement that is going to be signed for the next five-year period here imminently. So right now it's showing 13. The 13 increase is offset by -- I believe it's 36 positions that are removed from this budget that have moved to the Housing Corp related to the shelters that transferred between departments, so. But yes, you're right, there are a number of positions not reflected here that will soon be added. Those are the two biggest pots, though, the shared health priorities as well as the home care agreement. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, assistant deputy minister. Back to the Yellowknife North Member.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, and given that there's a significant number of positions that are going to disappear from this budget but then just appear again right away in the Housing NWT budget, I just think it's important for people to have a general sense that the overall number of sort of health and social services workers that we're going to be seeing out there is more like 90 or 100 sort of new workers. I think when you total all those up, just to have sort of some perspective on things.

I wanted to ask next, I think there was indication in my notes that some of the sunsets of federal funding could affect funding for frontline workers such as community mental health nurses, addictions nurses, regional public health nurses. Is that funding expected to be restored or renegotiated, or should we expect to see some loss in terms of those types of frontline positions in 2026-2027? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member. To the Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As the ADM has stated, the way that the budget is processed, so we don't have the agreement -- we didn't have the Working Together Agreement with Health Canada, and we didn't have the First Nation home and community care signed off by the time that this budget was available. The funding for those positions is until March 31st that were up -- like, that were in the current budget; however, by the time this budget was printed and put together we don't -- like, we have commitment to the working together ongoing funding, the same funding. So those positions, come April 1st, you know, what will happen is is that once the agreement gets signed, you'll usually see that reflected in a supplementary appropriation the next time that we sit, so. However, there is no -- because the agreements will backdate to April 1st, there is no changing of the positions.

So those positions will continue to be there. We're just in the process of signing agreements. They just don't happen when we want them to happen. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. To the Member of Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So that, I think -- I think that gives us assurance that those positions won't be cut, as far as we can tell.

I wanted to ask, because I did see there was a reduction of one position due to the sunset of Public Health Agency of Canada funding, and it was related to hospitals injury reporting and prevention program. So I am wondering if -- if that -- the hospitals injury reporting and prevention program is concluded now or if that's continuing, but I wondered what was accomplished during the term of that position before it has sunsetted. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, that third party funding is currently being renegotiated and that -- there is no change in that position so it will continue. And that goes for many of our third party fundings within our system. So we get our health transfer which funds, you know, and we get our portion of the funding, but then there's all of the different federal agreements, that they have multiple different agreements that they fund us in different ways, so that's the -- like, and I said in my previous statement that's why we have to do this accounting thing every time, every year, it seems like. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. And in the spirit of time there, I'll recognize one more question, if you do there, to the Member of Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the Minister helping to explain that. I know that the budgets can get confusing but I think for people to have a clearer sense overall of what's happening is helpful. I'll hopefully get another ten minutes.

But I wanted to start -- touch on -- this is the last line of questioning -- the business plans for HSS around recruitment and retention initiatives for the healthcare workforce. I am noticing on page 24, 25, 26 of the business plan that we have not yet established any targets for employee turnover rates, vacancy rates. Can the Minister explain why we don't have any targets established for improving those things. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member of Yellowknife North. Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes, thank you. Mr. Chair, right now, we're in the process of putting those measurements in, and that's through the new recruitment strategy. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Minister. We will move on. Did you want to go back on the list there, Member of Yellowknife North? Okay, we shall do that.

The chair recognizes the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I recognize your generous indulgence of Members' questions. I want to dig into something that dates back to a previous budget but shows as a line item here, and so this one may be a bit of a history lesson that I am hoping the staff can maybe take us through.

So the Health System Investments Agreement is listed in this budget as activities related to climate change and wastewater surveillance in NWT communities, illicit drug toxicity. It has -- this line item has previously been described as funding from Indigenous Service Canada for activities related to improving midwifery services in NWT communities. And that's what I wanted to ask about, was what happened to that funding for midwifery services specifically? How was that spent in previous years; was it carried over? It's been unclear. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member of Frame Lake. Minister. We'll transfer over to the assistant deputy minister. Please, go ahead.

MS. JEANNIE MATHISON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So that line on Health System Investment Agreement, like, I -- yeah, that is -- that is something that we've set up with the federal government to -- as a pathway to fund us for some of those one-time, not necessarily program-specific funding pots that come available. And they were previously adding all of the funding that they had to provide to us under the Northern Wellness Agreement but it was getting confusing under the Northern Wellness Agreement, so we pieced it out and created this separate path under the Health System Investment Agreement, and it is specifically that, for very time-limited sorts of funding that they want to offer to us to do time-limited efforts.

The midwifery, we may have to get a little bit more detail, but the midwifery one, my recollection is that we actually have a carryover on that pot of money right now that we're just

trying to determine whether or not it's eligible for future carryover -- it went unspent -- and whether or not we can still use that or whether or not it needs to be returned to the federal government as unspent funds. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, assistant deputy minister. The Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, that's exactly what I was looking to find out, and I appreciate the answer on that. So it sounds like we're going to have to do a bit of commitment for a follow-up there. But in that commitment, I'd appreciate them helping us understand why the funding wasn't spent as well. You know, I've raised midwifery pretty much every sitting since the beginning and, you know, have some constituents who are very passionate about it and so will continue to do so. And so I am just wondering, you know, there was a controversial budget cut a few years ago where midwifery services were cut, and now I am hearing that we are -- potentially lapsed some funding that we could have probably used to fund that and, you know, I plan to save this -- a bit of this for a Members' statement later in the sitting, but I would just note that I attended a great session put on by health and social services staff at the Explorer Hotel -- maybe it was the Nova Hotel. I always get them mixed up. Sorry, it was the Chateau Nova. We went to that and it was all about, you know, removing systemic racism from our healthcare system and building an appropriate healthcare system for Indigenous people around the territory. And I noted that one of the things that they put in there was midwifery and the access to that and access to appropriate Indigenous care. And so I really appreciated them highlighting that but found that it didn't jive with how the department has been rolling out or not rolling out midwifery, and so I found that confusing. So just to get right back to the question, I would appreciate a follow-up on whether the funding lapsed, why it was lapsed. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member from Frame Lake. Please go ahead, Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, over the last couple of years we have continued to -- NTHSSA has continued to advertise over and over again for these positions; however, they've all -- they've gone unfilled so that's the reason why the positions that were -- you know, we had conversations with some of the surrounding communities. They were not interested in this type of a program at this time, some of our

smaller Indigenous communities closer to. And so the important thing that we have to make sure is that when we are providing these services that, you know, we can't just tell communities that this is what they need to provide when we can't even staff these positions. So where we struggle with right now is that we are -- I believe even in Hay River and Fort Smith, the numbers of deliveries are going down. You know, the high risk of, you know, the maternal patients that, you know, they have to go into a different facility because -- you know, because of whatever their risk factors are. So, however, I would love to say I would love to put a midwife and a birthing centre in every single community, like, you know, the realistic thing is that we have to take a look at what our patients are. And many of our patients that are birthing nowadays -- and it's not all of them -- but are high risk. And so when we look at this area, we struggle to hire positions in our two current birthing facilities as it is. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. To the Member of Frame Lake, go ahead, please.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do want to just go back to the Minister's staff. There was a potential commitment on the table, but I haven't heard it specifically referred to. So can staff get back to me with details about the lapse in funding and why it lapsed. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member of Frame Lake. Please go ahead, ADM.

MS. JEANNIE MATHISON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've just been able to confirm that we did just get approval to carry over the funding, and we're currently proposing to use that funds for -- to explore traditional birth works. That's in process right now and just seeking federal support for that proposal, but we do have approval to carry over the funding. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, assistant deputy minister. The Member of Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's an exciting development so amazed at how fast we've been able to move on this issue in the short ten minutes I've had. So thank you for the detail there. I do appreciate that and will just say, I mean, I am going to continue to advocate for midwifery as I already said, so. I am going to leave it at that for now and maybe cede the floor to another Member and will let you know if I have some further questions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member of Frame Lake. We shall move on, and the other Member on the list is out. To the Member of Monfwi, did you have any questions? I thought I seen your hands up earlier.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Are we still on revenue summary? When we receive money, it's good, you know. But I see here in the budget there are some -- I don't know if it's sunsetted because it didn't say, you know, agreement to work with -- I see there's quite a few agreements -- agreement was signed with other -- with Canada. So agreement to work together to improve health care for Canadians, there's nothing in the budget for upcoming fiscal year. There's quite a few of those too. Even with First Nation and Inuit Community Care Agreement, there's nothing allocated. So I just wanted to ask the Minister if the Minister can explain why. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member of Monfwi. Please go ahead, Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, as the federal budget was only announced late in November that before -- before that, we -- you know, and then we begin to work with them to renew these two program areas. And so as of right now, I believe that the funding hasn't changed in either one of those with the federal government. We just are in the process of negotiating it and once those are signed off, I believe they're not -- there's no change in them. We already know what they are; we just have to sign them off now. And then because they expire at the end of March 31st, the current agreements, we have to have the new agreements signed off before they could be added back into the budget, which would come at a later date. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Minister. Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, improving health care, it's very important, especially in the small communities in the Northwest Territories. It's mostly in -- almost all the Indigenous communities across Canada, health care needs to be improved. It's good to know that there's going -- you know, that funding will be renewed, the agreement for the funding will be renewed.

The other one here, capital transfer, a Green and Inclusive Community Building Agreement, that budget is cut in half for the upcoming fiscal year. Can the Minister also explain why that this

funding it's -- like going from \$15 million to half of that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member of Monfwi. Please go ahead, Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, that was the -- that is for the wellness and recovery centre and so through the budgets, as we have needed it, this is a fully, I believe, federal funded capital project and so it's being funded through -- as we can roll out this year what needs -- what's needing to be allocated, and I believe it was over three years until it was completed, and then we -- to open. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. To the Member of Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Okay, there's a decrease for the upcoming fiscal year to Aging with Dignity Funding Agreement. It was down in 2025-2026 and then with the revised estimate, and then now with a -- in the main estimate, it's down a bit to 3.6. Aging with Dignity Funding Agreement, that's very important, especially for people living in small communities in long-term care, etcetera. So if the Minister can explain, is that -- is it due to that -- because of the federal announcement?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member of Monfwi. Please go ahead, assistant deputy minister.

MS. JEANNIE MATHISON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The three-year agreement is -- the value of the agreement has not changed. When we put our proposal into the feds on how we wanted to spend the money, we just allocated it a little bit differently over each year, and so that is what's represented there. It's not that any funding has gone down from the federal government. It's just how we have allocated to spend the total value of the agreement. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, assistant deputy minister. I'll remind the Member that we're on the activity of administrative and support services, so if you can maintain the questions related to that activity there, please. Please go ahead, Member of Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, so what page are we on, then? 198, okay. I know that with administrative and support services, I don't see in here -- it would have been nice if we can -- if we know the administrative and support services, if it was broken down by regions so then I could see clearly how much is

being spent to Tlicho region. You know, like, I am sure you would like to know too, for Sahtu, you know, because all regions are important to us and we do rely heavily on the government program and services. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member of Monfwi. Minister, do you want to reply?

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes, I would just refer to the funding to other sources in the appendices. That is where it's broken down to the different authorities. And so I believe if the Member is looking for the Tlicho health authority, TCSA, that would be broken down of what that's allocated there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Minister. No further questions for the Member of Monfwi. We shall move on here. One of the Members is missing, so I will go with the Member of Great Slave then on to Yellowknife North. Please go ahead there, Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try and be brief. I am very excited about the 24/7 model of the laboratory and diagnostic imaging services for Stanton that has been announced in this budget. It appears that 21 new positions will be established to support that model. Can the Minister elaborate as to how that model will run and whether or not positions will be difficult to recruit and retain? I know that having such a service is very important to many of my constituents, and I know they would want to see it succeed. We have difficulty with retention sometimes in health care, so I'd love to hear the Minister's thoughts on that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Member of Great Slave. To the Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The important piece around this laboratory and expansion, x-ray expansion in the budget, is related to many of the issues that we have heard from, you know, from town halls, heard from residents through BFs, through MLAs, through other Ministers bringing their concerns to my office, as well as my own constituents. As you know that the Stanton -- you know, the positions will be, you know, put into the territorial -- Stanton Territorial Hospital but the Stanton Territorial Hospital, as I say, is a territorial support for the entire territory. So it's really important that -- that when we -- currently, we have a seven and a half hour, you know, with extended hours and flex -- you know, sometimes they flex and most of the time it's overtime. We do not have enough positions to run a 24-hour but yet we need a 24-hour

because we know that our hospital is gridlocked, our ICU is always full, our emergency department is always full, and therefore patients need to move. And usually the things that are holding up, you know, making sure that they're being diagnosed properly or tended to properly is blood work, is x-rays, is CT scans, is those types of things. And where we were also spending a lot of money is sending a lot of the tests out of territory. And so where another part of it is is that we had to increase our -- like, we couldn't keep putting more and more on this current staffing levels that we had. And we heard that from the staff, that we had to increase the staff so that way when all of the blood work is coming in from all of the communities in the territory that that is being serviced and it's being actioned all the time. So there's always somebody working in the lab. There's always somebody drawing blood. There's always somebody there to be able to x-ray. So this is why it's so important that, you know, we take this -- we recognize that this is a territorial initiative. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. Member of Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And apologies if I wasn't clear. My interest is in what the the Minister and her department and the authority, I suppose, will do to retain these positions. I assume not everybody wants to work the midnight shift at the lab, although it -- as the Minister has demonstrated in her last response, it is very important and it is very needed for everyone in the territory. So is there a plan in place to make sure that once we have recruited these positions, what retention looks like. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Member of Great Slave. Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the conversations that I've had with NTHSSA, as this is the operational arm of the health, they have stated to us that these types of positions right now that they are -- they can pretty much say that they are able to recruit these positions, especially at the territorial hospital. And so what we have done, you know, and I think is that we've asked them to start to look at it, to be able to start that operationally and look as to what it looks like. And as some of -- under the direction of myself is to -- because NTHSSA, you know, they create their budgets, they can reallocate as needed, they have been ramping up these efforts and looking and recruiting in to bringing on extra staffing, which is already showing results. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. Member of Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I don't know how to restate it, but I am curious if there are any retention measures that are also being considered by NTHSSA for this new 24/7 model. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Member of Great Slave. Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, they would follow our collective agreement if they are eligible for whatever's under the collective agreement as well as the current things that we have within the health authority to support and retain through our previous recruitment initiatives. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. Member of Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll put that one down for the moment.

Can the Minister describe the role of the newly proposed nurse case manager positions for medical travel, the medical travel case management initiative, how -- I recognize, I think -- I believe it's three positions are being added for this new initiative. Does the Minister feel that three positions are adequate, enough people to suss through all of the various longstanding issues with medical travel that is discussed in this House every single session? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Member of Great Slave. Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As this is through hospital services and that will be within the health authority, I know that is another section, and I -- I mean, high levelly, these three positions, it is a pilot over the next couple of years, is this is what we're trying to do. We don't want to create something that is not working but we also want to be flexible to put -- what we've heard from many residents that are travelling is that travel is not coordinated, it comes in, nobody's coordinating the travel, people are travelling out, and then they have to come back, and then they're travelling out a week later or even sometimes at the end of the week. And this is -- we have to look at ways and we have to have people in there that can manage that and can case manage all of our travel. And so there's -- we currently, within the health authority, under medical travel, that administer the medical travel, they have teams. And so one of these case managers will be assigned to each of those teams to ensure that when patients

are -- you know, we have many locums, many physicians, locums, nurses that are coming in that are -- you know, that are terms that may not know our system, and so sometimes they'll put in a medical travel when it's not necessary. Or administrative staff might get a referral that says that somebody needs a follow-up but that follow-up could actually be done in the territory or virtually. That's what this is going to do. And over the next couple of years, if these positions are in the budget, moving forward, then we will be able to track and manage how they are supporting their unit. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. I just want to share a reminder by our interpreters requesting Members to slow down. So if we can all be mindful of our interpretation staff.

Thank you, Minister. And we will go back to the Member. Thank you.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I hope I am being slow enough. I will try.

I think my last question, as my time is running out is -- and I want to thank the Minister for that answer, and I want to thank her and her staff for identifying that indeed there is oversight needed on medical travel, and I think this initiative is a good idea.

Can the Minister please tell me if these new positions, and indeed this work of this initiative, will more fully dovetail with the medical travel approach of the -- for GNWT employees. There seems to be some disparate pieces between the two and how they're handled. I think if -- no matter where you're employed or if you're employed within the NWT, you should be receiving the same level of service for medical travel. Is there any contemplation around a bigger wholesale review of medical travel case management in that perspective? Maybe not for these positions, but in general. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Member of Great Slave. Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe -- and I can -- I believe within medical travel, whether you're with any other insurance that -- if it's GNWT that's paying for your travel out of territory, this is prior to that. So this is going to be the case management to say whether or not this travel can be done in your home community, is it urgent, does it need to be done right now, is there a need that -- you know, that we could, you know, actually book it because you have another appointment coming up, you know, it's -- so that is what that is before it goes to who's paying for the medical travel. So I believe that that's within the system. And

then once it's deemed that they need to travel, that's when it would be referred to -- because I believe GNWT doesn't get the information as to why the person is travelling. They just get to know that it's been approved for travel.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. We will now move on to the Yellowknife North Member, and afterwards, if the Mackenzie Delta Member returns, he will be going afterwards. Please go ahead there, Yellowknife North Member.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So just to continue along my previous line of questions and also to build upon the questions of my colleague from Great Slave, so we see in the business plan that employee turnover rates between 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 actually got a bit worse. They've been pretty stable but got slightly worse, and employee turnover is about 15 percent. I know the Minister has referred to a new people strategy that we can expect to see soon, but we have been talking about staff recruitment -- sorry, especially staff retention over the last two years and as far as we can tell, we don't see that there's been any improvement. So can the Minister point or assure us that there's actually going to be new approaches that will turn this around and change something in terms of employee turnover coming soon? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Member of Yellowknife North. Please go ahead there, Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I appreciate this question. I know that within the health and social services area, it is -- you know, and I -- we struggle to retain healthcare workers. You know, I mean, of all of the reasons that we talk about in this House, you know, the cost of living, the -- you know, and there's -- we have childcare issues. There's many different reasons why. However, there's things that are -- we're restrained by within the public service that we can provide to staff, and I think that's the issue right now that we're dealing with. It's the things that the staff that have raised that if we -- you know, that we struggle that we -- within being public service against collective agreements and things like that that we are -- so what we are trying to do is we are trying to stay within the area that we can support, and we're going to continue with the things that we have had but there are -- with the people strategy coming out, there is going to be new things, and there's going to be things that we may have to relook at our -- like, health and social services has to relook at their budget. And I think this comes along with the health sustainability unit. And the work that they're doing is as a health and social services system,

we need to retain our staff and provide programming, but right now we're already struggling to do that within the budget that we have. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. Back to the Member of Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I can appreciate for sure that some of the keys to staff retention go beyond HSS. So how is the Minister working together in some sort of systemic way with, say the Minister of Finance, to ensure that all the possible tools are used to ensure health care worker retention, like, around collective bargaining and other sort of general HR practices. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member of Yellowknife North. Please go ahead, Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes, I am going to turn that over to the deputy minister because the deputy minister at his level is working -- that is where I think, with him, and the other -- the departments that are having these conversations. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. Please go ahead, deputy minister.

MR. ALAN DOODY: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you for the question. So as the Member stated -- and building on what the Minister said, there -- when we look at recruitment and retention across -- regardless of the sector, whether it's health care or not, there's -- it is complex and there's all -- there's multiple factors. So there is ongoing work across government at the deputy level and at levels below on items related to housing to support workers and things of that nature. And also within the health system, the NTHSSA in particular, have developed a work plan which is focused on initiatives to be able to recruit and retain healthcare workers. So that work plan is currently in draft, so it's not been shared publicly. But there's several initiatives in that as well that would look to address some of the recruitment and retention issues across the health care space. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, deputy minister. Member of Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So when are those new strategies or approaches going to be made public? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member. Please go ahead, Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, a lot of the -- so within this budget, it also takes in account some of the funding that they get for their recruitment and retention. And the way that health and social services, NTHSSA, and the authorities, build their budgets is once the -- like, right now, they're tentatively building their budgets but we don't see those budgets until after the budget is approved, and then they are able to finalize the money that's being allocated to them to put their -- to be able to allocate where their priorities are. And so this is -- as we said, the draft of their work plan is on going but the draft of the work plan is not going to be released publicly until that we can review it and we know what kind of funding that the health authorities will be getting and that we know -- ensure that they're dedicating funding to some of these areas within the draft work plan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Mr. Chair. I'll settle for that.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Or Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. To the Member of Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay. Maybe just with some limited time left, I know that one sort of promising avenue for trying to get more retention of healthcare workers is to hire more local students and recent graduates, people who grew up here, people who are from here, people who are already based here and have ties to this community. So how does HSS or the health authorities connect with, say, Aurora College graduates of the nursing program or local candidates for various health care professions to try to ensure that we have more local people taking these jobs? I do see in the business plan that 49 percent of new hires, at least in 2023-2024, were already NWT residents. I don't know how many sort of grew up here or for how long. But maybe the Minister can explain what efforts there are to try to recruit, you know, local people and recent graduates. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member of Yellowknife North. Please go ahead, Minister.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we have been very -- and I had this conversation with the NTHSSA just this week, and that is -- you know, it's -- the thing with them is that they're already starting to look at and reach out to the Aurora College graduates that are coming out too see where they want to work, how it -- like, and which communities they want to work in when they're graduating this

year. Last year, I think they found places for every graduate that wanted to work in the territory, whether it was the nursing, the personal support worker. I believe the LPN programs that have come in the past, they're all -- anyone who wants to come -- that's coming out of those programs is being provided with jobs. This year, there is going to be another large nursing graduating class so I was under the understanding that they are -- they feel that they can provide spaces for all of them in our system as well. But going forward, one of the struggles that they do have is that more and more that we're getting new grads into the system that we need to provide more mentorship. So that's why some of the pieces around the retention is working that into that draft plan, is building more mentorship within our own system so that those staff that are there -- you know, if they need to be an obstetric nurse, that they're being mentored into that area. If they need an OR nurse, we're mentoring them to those specialties, and then being able to provide them -- and it's also with the ones that are going south. Because we have the health bursary, the NTHSSA has said that now that they have the health bursary, they're able to track better all of the healthcare workers that are -- like, that are -- the students that are in health care fields that are out in school, they're able to reconnect with them to see whether they're coming back, when they're coming back, stuff like that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Minister. And I just wanted to add to that and help clarify the Member from Yellowknife North's comment on how you do that.

One of the glad ceremonies I like attending is the nursing graduation ceremonies, and both the Minister and the Minister of ECE attended the nursing graduation ceremony that Aurora College had last June across the street here. So we are, as a government, inspiring our graduates to continue on.

In the recognition of time here, I am going to say what is the wishes of committee? Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

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

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member. The motion is in order. The motion is non-debatable. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress. Mahsi. Oh sorry. I have to -- I am slipping; it must be Friday. Yes, just one second.

Thank you to the Minister and thank you to the witnesses there for appearing before us on this Friday, a long day. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witness from the chamber. Mahsi.

---SHORT RECESS

MR. SPEAKER: Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your committee has been considering Tabled Document 448-20(1). And, Mr. Speaker, I move that the Report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Can I have a seconder, please. Let's go with that person that doesn't like to vote for it, Member from Yellowknife Centre. All those in favour? Opposed? Motion carried. Unanimous.

---Carried

Report 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. The Standing Committee of Economic Development and Environment will meet at the rise of House.

Orders of the day for Monday, February 9th, 2026, at 1:30 p.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 3 of 7)
7. Acknowledgements
8. Oral Questions
9. Written Questions
 - Written Question 30-20(1), Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority Action Plans
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 448-20(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 Monday, February 9th, 2026, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 1:57 p.m.