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The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker

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Send corrections to kate_covello@ntassembly.ca

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Monday, February 16, 2026****Members Present**

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

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayer or Reflection

---Prayer or reflection

SPEAKER (HON. SHANE THOMPSON):

Please be seated. Colleagues, before we get into Ministers' statements, I'd like to recognize one young man and then an older gentleman in the House. A young man, I call him dad, Mr. Jack Cooper, a former resident of the Northwest Territories. Unfortunately, he's on his way to attend a service in Hay River, but I'd like to welcome dad or Jack Cooper into the House today. As well as there's this old guy beside him. Just so happens to be my best friend and so all the bad stories that I have on him, he has it on me. So I'd like to thank you both for being here today. And we'll get on to business. So welcome to our Assembly.

I'd like to thank Ms. Gargan for the opening prayer.

Ministers' statements. Minister of Health and Social Services.

Ministers' Statements**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 180-20(1):
YELLOWKNIFE PRIMARY CARE STATUS
UPDATE**

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, primary care is the first point of contact for most residents in our health system. It sets the direction for the care they receive and helps ensure people get the right care, at the right time, from the right provider.

As an Indigenous Minister with a background in health care, I understand both the frustrations of residents and the challenges our system is facing. Improving access, reducing inequities, and strengthening the way our system operates are priorities of this Legislative Assembly and are the priorities that I have been working hard to address since becoming Minister.

Through primary health care reform, we are setting the direction for a team-based model of care that is equitable, reliable, and culturally

safe. This approach supports our workforce, improves access for residents, and builds a system that communities can trust.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard from residents directly, and from my colleagues on the floor of this House, that many people have struggled to get primary care appointments, particularly here in Yellowknife. Those frustrations are real and understandable. That is why I am pleased to share some details about the work underway to improve access and the progress that we are already seeing.

In a system with limited capacity, every appointment slot matters. We have worked with reception and program assistants at the Yellowknife Primary Care to focus on reducing no-shows, and they have delivered meaningful results. By introducing reminder calls and clearly explaining the importance of cancelling appointments, no-show rates have steadily declined over the past three years. In fact, Yellowknife Primary Care is now performing better than national benchmarks, reaching a record low of 5 percent this December. This means more patients are being seen and fewer clinical hours are wasted.

Mr. Speaker, same-day access is another area where we are seeing clear improvements. Earlier this fiscal year, only 70 percent of same-day appointment requests were being met. By the third quarter, that number had increased to 82 percent. By maintaining a waitlist and adjusting how LPN, licensed practical nurses, community health nurses, and nurse practitioners are used, the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority has been able to maintain appointment availability despite limited physician hours. These changes allow the system to respond quickly to urgent needs and help ensure residents who need immediate care can get it.

Mr. Speaker, we have also implemented the trial of new tools that support staff and reduce administrative burden. One example is the introduction of the Mika AI Scribe tool now being tested in primary care sites across the territory. This speech-to-text tool creates accurate clinical notes, giving providers more time with patients and less time on paperwork. This trial responds directly to what frontline

practitioners told us during engagement sessions. Early feedback has been positive, and residents may be asked to provide consent to use this tool during future appointments in Yellowknife.

Mr. Speaker, improving and strengthening team-based care at Yellowknife Primary Care remains a key focus under my leadership. The Yellowknife regional team has created governance structures with Indigenous and multidisciplinary representation. Working groups are reviewing patient journeys, integrated care teams, and operational processes. They are already producing practical tools, such as standard operating procedures, intake tools, and workflow updates, that support consistent, high-quality care. These may not be the kinds of changes that make headlines, but they are essential to building the strong foundation we need for long-term primary health care reform. We must take the time to do this work properly, and that means involving both clients and staff in the design process.

Mr. Speaker, I have highlighted only a few of the improvements underway. Much more work is happening behind the scenes and across the system and I am confident that with the direction I have set, the strong teams in place, and clear accountability measures guiding this work, we will continue to see real improvements in primary care. I look forward to updating Members as this work progresses. Quyananni, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Frame Lake.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 885-20(1): INTERNATIONALLY EDUCATED NURSES

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we all know that our healthcare system is struggling to attract and hire nurses into our system due to the national nursing shortage. For this reason, we need to be thinking of new ways to grow our health care workforce.

One way we could do that is by establishing our own supervised practice experience program for training internationally educated nurses, or IENs for short. There are many IENs in the country, including here in the NWT, and due to the fact that nursing education differs substantially across the world, they may not be able to practice here with their current certification.

Currently, our rules require that IENs satisfy 450 hours of supervised practice time in another jurisdiction before they can work as a registered nurse here. It's important to note that this requirement is not simply regulatory red tape but is there to ensure nurses practicing here have demonstrated competency in key areas. Our problem is that we don't currently have a supervised practice experience program of our own which we can use to do this certification, so we rely on nurses completing that work down south. That doesn't help people who are currently living here and want to stay here and get certified, and it doesn't help us compete with our provincial counterparts who are also trying to attract nurses. For these reasons, I think we should investigate the possibility of establishing a supervised practice experience program here in the NWT as part of our suite of solutions for addressing our nursing shortage.

This would involve GNWT working closely with the college and association of nurses of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut as both organizations would have a role to play in establishing a successful program. These programs exist in other jurisdictions in Canada, so there may be a model already established that could be adapted and tailored to the needs of the NWT. The key role GNWT would play is in providing resources and preceptors to supervise and oversee training of program participants.

Mr. Speaker, we have nurses here who are already invested in the territory and want to stay and work here and grow their skill set. Let's not turn them away. We want to grow our local workforce. This is just one way we could achieve it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 886-20(1): LITERACY IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MS. MORGAN: Mr. Speaker, with education, as with health care, we can get caught up in lurching from one emergency to the next, from COVID to the feds yanking the rug out from under us with the massive scale back of Jordan's Principle funding. Now, it is essential for those supports to be restored, and today I will be tabling a letter from the Yellowknife school boards to the federal Ministers on Jordan's Principle.

We all have different roles. It's our responsibility as leaders and policy-makers to think beyond the immediate emergencies and to keep an eye

on the bigger picture and ensure our education fundamentals are sound. I fear, Mr. Speaker, that they are not.

When it comes to teaching kids to read in the early grades, we are not in line with best practices in the rest of the country. There is an overwhelming body of scientific evidence about what works and what doesn't, and as a jurisdiction the NWT is not following it. This is not teachers' fault. Methods for literacy instruction have not been taught in teachers' colleges.

We have adopted the BC curriculum now which includes standardized assessments for literacy and numeracy in grades 4, 7, 10 and 12, but we've ignored another key part of the BC system. In 2024, BC introduced early literacy screenings and structured literacy interventions in kindergarten to grade 3. We've not done it. If you wait until grade 4 before you find out that a kid is struggling to read, by that time students are supposed to be past learning to read; they need to be reading to learn. Letting kids fall so far behind makes everyone's life much more difficult, and it makes teachers' jobs unmanageable. Our failure to implement early literacy best practices is part of what is creating chaos in classrooms. Jordan's Principle funding alone cannot solve it.

In 2022, the Ontario Human Rights Commission released a landmark report called Right to Read. It clearly lays out how the status quo approach has failed students and teachers and how this is actually a human rights violation, particularly for Indigenous students who are already at higher risk of falling through the cracks of the education system. The Right to Read report lays out a detailed path forward that has since been followed by the governments of Ontario, BC, and the Yukon, amongst others. Mr. Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if we truly want to support teachers and set students early on on the best possible route to success, there is no time to waste in adopting early literacy best practices in the NWT as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 887-20(1):
CLOSURE OF IMPERIAL OIL PROJECT IN
NORMAN WELLS

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week I participated in Sahtu community engagements for the Mackenzie

Valley Highway. What we heard was deeply disturbing. Families are making difficult decisions about their futures as a result of the Imperial Oil's production closure scheduled for the third quarter of this year.

Mr. Speaker, I learned that we are losing 11 students across five families, and that's as of today. It may change in the near future. These families have already begun telling their children they will be moving on, potential teachers, staffing as well. An additional eight students from local families may also be affected, depending on how things unfold. That's nearly 20 percent of our student population, Mr. Speaker.

These aren't just statistics. These are families who have built their lives in Norman Wells, children who have been uprooted from their schools and friends, and parents who are being forced to choose between their community and their families' economic security.

Mr. Speaker, the Sahtu is resilient, but this closure impacts all levels of government, local residents, and the business community. As a hub for the region, surrounding communities will also be impacted. However, there is hope, Mr. Speaker.

The welcoming news of defence spending for an all-season corridor represents a transformative project that can help stabilize our region's economy and the NWT. I am encouraged by my colleagues from the Mackenzie Delta, Nahendeh for issuing support, a press release supporting the corridor connection, a connection that will position the Sahtu for more economic growth and resource development and in the hospitality sectors.

Mr. Speaker, the Sahtu has weathered challenges before, but our families cannot wait for tomorrow's promises while today's opportunities slip away. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Member from the Sahtu. Member's statement. Member from Great Slave.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 888-20(1):
INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy Louis Riel Day. But that's not my statement, Mr. Speaker.

I am tentatively optimistic with the direction that the GNWT is taking on integrated service delivery. The predecessor to this approach, integrated case management, was praised in an external review of the social return on investment of that program that was tabled in the 19th Assembly. Plainly put, meeting people

where they are at and assisting them to find their way through social service supports pays off, not only for individuals and families, but incidentally also for government. I am also encouraged to hear that providing wraparound supports and transitional and social housing is in the plans for builds both underway and announced last week. When folks have readily accessible supports that they need nearby, like daycare and the newly announced 54th Avenue housing project, our residents and community can grow stronger.

I can't help but to begin to dream a little bit bigger, Mr. Speaker, of a Yellowknife and a Northwest Territories that succeeds when the GNWT works hand-in-hand with NGOs and Indigenous governments who have expertise in social services that meet people where they are with what they need. The GNWT's public-facing role should always begin with a friendly how can I help you today, Mr. Speaker. And sometimes all it requires is just pointing someone in the right direction, but sometimes it does require a lot of assistance.

I want us to continue our momentum in a good way, on a trajectory that helps residents have meaningful outcomes for their lives and in alignment with the priorities of our Assembly. I will have questions for the Premier at the appropriate time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 889-20(1):
ARCTIC SECURITY

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last year I made a statement on the Canadian Institute for Arctic Security which is located in Whitehorse in the Yukon and what our plan would be, Mr. Speaker, given that this lens that's now on the North. I stress the importance of our territory having a similar voice for issues dealing with all things Arctic sovereignty and security, and now a year later there is most definitely an interest in the Arctic, Mr. Speaker. We are now at a point where we know there is significant funding earmarked for meaningful infrastructure in the two northern operational hubs of Inuvik and Yellowknife. And by significant, Mr. Speaker, we may be talking in the billions of dollars as we know.

I spoke in my budget reply from the accountability and oversight committee of the importance of being prepared, of meeting the moment, of putting our commitments into action, not just with words, but with capacity. I, as well as many of my colleagues, have spoken about the importance of ensuring we have

capacity in the regions, putting the resources where it is needed most. And what I mean by capacity, Mr. Speaker, is senior decision makers in the regions that will see significant activity from this investment. Inuvik, Mr. Speaker, is obviously one of those regions.

We need to ensure that we have boots on the ground that are well-versed in all things Beaufort Delta to ensure we have the expertise to advise the GNWT as well as liaise with DND making the critical decisions around logistics, procurement, culture, and other areas where local knowledge will be imperative. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that an ADM position in Inuvik could serve this purpose. It will show residents of Inuvik that we are, indeed, serious about all things Arctic security and are putting our words into action. The Department of National Defence is hosting a public town hall on Tuesday, April 17th in Inuvik to share information about their infrastructure plans and to hear directly from the community. They will have representatives there to answer questions and discuss what this could mean for Inuvik. Meetings like these are of significant importance, and we have to have the people in place to participate, and we need those people at a senior level, Mr. Speaker.

I know the Premier and Cabinet are in constant contact with our counterparts in Ottawa, and I am confident in our ability to continue to move the political needle on Arctic infrastructure. But as we've seen many times, one small oversight in a region can cause delays, misinformation, or worse stop projects altogether. We must ensure that we are in tune with what's happening on the ground in Inuvik, and we must show that we are serious about putting our words into action for the people of the Beaufort Delta. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 890-20(1):
DIABETES IN THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a serious health crisis is quietly emerging in the Northwest Territories. Diabetes has become widespread across our communities, reaching levels that are now epidemic. The most recent data shows that approximately 9,400 residents are living with diabetes or pre-diabetes, an astonishing figure when placed against our population of 45,500 people. Approximately one in five NWT residents, or roughly 20 percent, of our population is affected.

Mr. Speaker, these numbers aren't merely statistical concerns. They represent families, friends, and community members whose lives are changed every day by this chronic condition. Diabetes is a major cause and driver of heart attacks, kidney failure, liver, amputations, and preventable blindness. These are life altering and too often life-ending complications. The burden of diabetes is felt even more intensely among Indigenous people who face disproportionately higher rates due to longstanding systemic inequities, socio-economic disadvantage, and barriers to accessing culturally appropriate care. By every meaningful public health measure, this level of disease exceeds what we would consider normal or expected in a population our size.

While diabetes has not been formally declared an epidemic by government authorities, it meets the criteria: Widespread prevalence, escalating impacts, and trajectory that threatens the long-term health of our communities.

Mr. Speaker, if we are to meaningfully confront this crisis, we must recognize diabetes for what it has become in the Northwest Territories - a silent epidemic, and commit to the investment, education, and prevention efforts needed to turn these trends around. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 891-20(1):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES CUTS TO EDUCATION

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last year I warned that limits placed on federal Jordan's Principle programs would have dire consequences for Indigenous students. Since then, school after school has been hit by waves of cuts while this government fails to take real action. In this chamber, we are considering yet another budget cut -- sorry, a budget that continues to ignore this growing crisis. Even another wave of cuts is set to hit schools this summer.

In Yellowknife alone, YK faced a \$6 million cut last year. And in June, YCS will be left with \$8 million in the hole. Nearly 600 Indigenous students, YCS students, will see support vanish from classroom assistants, speech-language therapy, to social emotional coaching, and a vital culture in literacy and numerous programs. They are core services for Indigenous students, especially for those with complex needs. Indigenous graduation rates remain

unacceptably below average, but the number has least improved in this year, and the funding began with Indigenous graduation rates relied on Jordan's Principle funding. But those same supports will no longer reach the next generation.

Before this government rolls back the progress we made for Indigenous education, I want to remind my colleagues that Jordan's Principle was created because the court recognized that the government had failed to provide Indigenous children the services they were entitled to. It may have seemed convenient to let the federal government pick up the tab on core territorial services by leaving the school dependence on Jordan's Principle. This government has admitted it has failed in responsibility and has abandoned any effort to fulfill it. My communities are asking what about their sacred treaty rights to education. What about UNDRIP, Article 14, or the TRC seven Calls to Action which demands we eliminate education and employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

This government has an exclusive education review underway and must ensure that these core services are included in ECE funding. But the review is not due until next year. The Minister needs support to find a solution right now and within the federal budget the next few weeks away. My communities are also working with the Premier in doing so with Ottawa. I will have questions for both the Minister and the Premier later on today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 892-20(1):
NORTHWEST POWER RATES

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, over a decade ago I was here on the vanguard asking the question why go to an automatic power franchise renewal.

Mr. Speaker, there's more than one company out there that could do this. I read this on the weekend, and I was kind of surprised, if not shocked, to see that the city is going to an automatic renewal with the current provider. That would be Naka Power, Mr. Speaker. No one's speaking ill will. They provide a great service to the community. They're wonderful people. But, Mr. Speaker, the problem comes down to is couldn't we do business better, and can we find ways to turn every single stone over to make it more affordable for residents?

Mr. Speaker, since coming to office over 800, almost 900 days ago, we talked about trying to lower cost of living. My question is here's a problem; why not consider a solution.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the city administration is recommending -- within their rights, of course -- that councillors keep the power purchase franchise agreement with Naka Power. Mr. Speaker, I recognize their authority to do such, but the problem with a ten-year franchise agreement, Mr. Speaker, is no one currently will be around. And I have a fact to that point, Mr. Speaker.

To my best estimate, the last power renewal over ten years ago, there's only one city councillor around from those days, Mr. Speaker. So the point being is if people say well, it's unaffordable, and then the argument on the other side will be is we live here too, we -- you know, it's we understand the system better than anyone else. Well, it's easy to all of a sudden say well, let's just go for convenience, Mr. Speaker, because we don't want to fight or do this muscle.

Mr. Speaker, a power corporation doesn't put up a big fight if they don't want to keep it. Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of money to be made in these power purchase agreements and how they sell to the citizens, such as us, everyone in this room.

Mr. Speaker, cost of living hurts every single one of us. Let me underscore that, Mr. Speaker. I don't know anybody who's saying, boy, I wish my power rates were higher.

Mr. Speaker, at the time, working with the Minister responsible for the power corporation, they articulated residents in Yellowknife would receive a significant reduction, a noticeable reduction, if it went to competition. Mr. Speaker, herein lies the problem and certainly the opportunity: If the City of Yellowknife said, okay, we are in a hurry and we don't have the proper time and energy to devote to review and renew the process for this renewed opportunity, Mr. Speaker, what they could do is commit to a shorter term, five years. And then they can say, we will visit it, and we'll start working on it now, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's about the bottom line for the working family. We can do better, and I certainly encourage the city to consider other options. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 893-20(1): CONDOLENCES FOR TUMBLER RIDGE

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, over the past week, Canadians have come together and shared sorrow and grief over the heartbreaking events in Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia. Over the weekend, when I saw the Prime Minister, Leader of the Official Opposition, and Governor General stand together in solidarity during this profound loss, I was reminded that the common bonds of our compassion, empathy, and respect for one another can break through the cynicism and partisanship that so often dominates public life. The loss of children taken so soon from their families is a heartbreak that touches us all.

As a father, I feel this sorrow deeply, especially when I see those bright smiling faces now taken from their loved ones through an act of uncomprehensible violence. Parents send their kids to school every morning knowing their safety is assured. I can't even begin to process the pain of a child not coming home from school ever again.

In times of great trauma, we need to slow down, listen, and be intentional in our care for one another. We must choose compassion because humanity is something we cultivate together. Wounds are deepened when numbness and indifference allow pain to echo, but when we act in kindness and empathy we set in motion a cycle of healing, a cycle that lifts communities, restores trust, and reminds us that we are stronger together.

But while our digital age has connected us like never before, it has also left many of us, especially young people, trapped in hidden corners of anxiety, loneliness, and uncertainty about the future. We must not just react to crisis but move forward with compassion for one another that never leaves anyone behind. That is who we are as Canadians, as Northerners, a people who stand together in times of grief, who lift one another in times of struggle, and who believe that through everyday acts of kindness, courage, and community, we will never stop building a stronger, safer, and more helpful tomorrow. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 894-20(1): INTERIM SUPERINTENDENTS OF DEHCHO DIVISIONAL EDUCATION COUNCIL

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Colleagues, today it gives me great pleasure to acknowledge and express appreciation for the return of two well-respected educators - Ms. Jane Arychuk

and Ms. Terry Jaffery - who have stepped forward to serve as interim superintendent and associate superintendent for the Deh Cho Divisional Education Council. Their leadership, experience, and commitment to education in the Northwest Territories are invaluable as the council works to recruit a permanent superintendent.

Ms. Arychuk brings a wealth of experience to this interim role. She began her tenure as interim president of Aurora College in July 2012 and was appointed president that December. Before her time in that office, Ms. Arychuk served as campus director of the Yellowknife North Slave Campus for seven years as well as vice-president of community and extensions at Aurora College. Her roots in northern education runs deep. Prior to joining Aurora College, she spent more than 20 years as a community educator and principal at Deh Gah School in Fort Providence. Her leadership and deep understanding of community-based education will be great assets during this transitional period.

Ms. Terry Jaffery brings extensive experience and dedication. She taught in Fort Liard and in Fort Simpson before serving as principal of Bompas Elementary School and later as superintendent of the Deh Cho Divisional Education Council for over nine years before her retirement. Her return to assist the region demonstrates her continued dedication to students, staff, and communities across the Deh Cho.

Colleagues, we are fortunate to have both respected leaders return to support the Deh Cho Divisional Education Council and our schools. Their steady hands and institutional knowledge will ensure continuity and stability as the process unfolds to select a new superintendent.

In closing, I would like to say that I have had the pleasure of working with both ladies, and I know their commitment to the students of the Deh Cho is beyond reproach. I have witnessed these women accomplish amazing things in the schools and throughout the region over the years. I would like to thank the Minister and the DDEC trustees for making this possible.

Members' statements. Returns to Oral Questions. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery. Acknowledgements. Oh sorry, which one are we at? Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery. Member from Frame Lake

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You're so efficient, you got ahead with it. I just wanted

to acknowledge one of the pages in the Assembly as a Frame Lake resident, Ms. Charlotte Hilton. We're certainly happy to see her in the House today and happy to have her assistance. So thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery. I don't know. Member from Yellowknife South.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have two pages here today, but I see only one in the gallery, so I might hold off for tomorrow on the other. But fortunately for me Ms. Shanli Carlson is a resident of Yellowknife South, and I am always happy to see her when she's visiting us here at the ledge. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife South. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery.

If we have missed anyone in the gallery today, welcome to your chambers. Greatly appreciate you allowing us the opportunity to represent people in the Northwest Territories. I hope you enjoy the proceedings. It is always nice to see people in the gallery.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery. Acknowledgements. Oral Questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 1038-20(1): MUNICIPAL POWER PURCHASE AGREEMENTS

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions will be to the Minister responsible for the NWT Power Corp. Noting that Hay River has now moved from working with a franchise agreement with Naka Power and they've gone directly to NT Power Corp, Mr. Speaker, I am wondering when will we get some type of public articulation of the savings that have been hopefully realized by changing their power purchase agreement directly with NWT Power Corp. Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the decision by the Hay River Town Council to switch providers was now 12 years ago. So quite a lot has obviously changed in the interim time, but I will certainly go back to NTPC and see what they can provide in terms of some analysis of what

has changed in the power rates over the last 12 years. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have no doubt the Minister is familiar with the legislation that empowers this process to at least if not a perfect degree, to some degree. As such, Mr. Speaker, would the Minister be familiar with what types of steps and processes it would require to eliminate any type of franchising power? In other words, getting rid of a third party and connecting directly to NWT Power Corp in all our communities directly. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can say that at this point in time there is no plan or intention to remove the franchising opportunity or to otherwise remove right now the presence of other franchises here in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I was more trying to target process as opposed to current action, Mr. Speaker. So I guess in some ways I will just repeat the similar type of question, which is, Mr. Speaker, what type of process would it take to eliminate a third party managing power distribution in the Northwest Territories and therefore the NWT Power Corp., which in this case there really isn't competition, would directly supply customers directly. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I certainly didn't mean to not answer the question but simply to emphasize that at this point in time there are two utility companies here operating in the Northwest Territories, and there's not an expectation or any -- I've not received any other interest in changing that. So, Mr. Speaker, the focus has been on trying to ensure that the two companies work well together in terms of generation, distribution, and in working together when there is overlap between them in those two things. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for NTPC. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife North.

QUESTION 1039-20(1):
EARLY LITERACY SCREENING AND
INTERVENTIONS

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So following up on my Member's statement, I have

questions for the Minister of education about early literacy.

So given that we have now adopted the BC curriculum, will the NWT similarly be adopting BC's approach to regular early literacy screenings conducted by teachers from kindergarten to grade 3? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, ECE is currently reviewing BCE -- or sorry, BC's early literacy screening model as part of its quest to strengthen early identification here in the Northwest Territories as well. So some NWT education bodies, Mr. Speaker, have already instituted early screening with students, and it is certainly my goal to see that this is applied consistently across the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So that's a promising start. So given that other jurisdictions throughout the country, including Ontario, BC, and the Yukon, have now implemented policies requiring science-based methods of teaching early literacy, is it within the Minister's scope here in the NWT to similarly implement policies regarding early literacy instruction, or should this be left up to each school board or school or even individual classroom teachers the way it is now? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, here in the Northwest Territories we certainly have a unique governance model that's found in one place across Canada, and that is here in the Northwest Territories where we really have a decentralized system here, and so what you find is that ECE sets the overall JK to 12 framework and funds the system while regional education bodies deliver programming and employ school staff. So what that essentially means as per the Education Act is the department just decides what the what might be, so what is our overall goal, which might be in this case, you know, high quality early reading supports for students, and then it is the education body that determines the how, so how that's going to be achieved. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So given that the Ontario Human Rights

Commission's Right to Read report determined that the balanced literacy approach risks violating the human rights of Indigenous students in particular, and the fact that balanced literacy is still the dominant approach here, does the Minister consider the Right to Read recommendations to be relevant in the NWT? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In short, the answer is yes. Yes, the Right to Read report is definitely very relevant here in the Northwest Territories as its focus is on equitable access to effective reading instruction, especially for Indigenous students. This report finds that queuing or balanced literacy approaches are not supported for teaching word reading and calls for explicit systematic instruction in phonetic awareness, phonics, decoding, and fluency. It's important to note here, Mr. Speaker, that the new NWT-adapted curriculum includes these foundational components as part of the new curriculum implementation. One of our focuses is to strengthen the consistency of these practices across education bodies, and it's also important to note that literacy is baked into courses right across the curriculum, not solely found in, for example, language instruction. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1040-20(1):
READINESS FOR CLOSURE OF IMPERIAL
OIL OPERATIONS IN NORMAN WELLS

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment, following up on my Member's statement there.

Mr. Speaker, February the 6th, my Member's statement were readiness for the Mackenzie Valley Highway. My question today is readiness for Imperial closure. My first question: Will the Minister support a joint Mackenzie Valley Highway and Esso closure readiness session in Norman Wells? We got a commitment for the highway readiness session. Now I want to bring two together. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member. I know he was busy at work at these engagement sessions last week. I would say one of the things that's really critically important here is the timelines of these projects might be different as well as the business and trades

needs of these projects as well. And so while there might be similarities, I think what we might find is that we might be able to be a lot more specific and a lot more purposeful in keeping these two projects separate. But I am certainly happy to work with the Member to see how we can kind of capitalize on some of those meetings to make sure that we're bringing together the right people at the right time. Thank you.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the Minister for that reply here. I look forward to working with her office on a joint arrangement.

My next question: Will the Minister direct the regional office to develop an impacts assessment report from community members through an interview? It's such a huge impact. You've got to hear it for yourself. It takes more than three minutes on a statement to capture the essence and the magnitude of the situation. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in short, yes. When we were working last year with the community of Norman Wells when fuel was not received last winter, we made sure that we were talking directly to businesses in the region to understand those impacts. And so these weren't new relationships or new conversations at all. So certainly making sure that we're continuing those conversations and continuing to learn how we can work together on the next phases is going to be critically important. 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 reply here. It's extremely -- and I can't emphasize how extremely -- it is for residents of small communities to hear from the government. And for that, I respect the visits in previous months here by the government. My last question, Mr. Speaker: Next month the Minister of Infrastructure is touring the Sahtu by winter road. Can the Minister of ITI coordinate a joint hall meeting with the public on that timeline? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately my calendar does not align very well next month with the Minister of Infrastructure. But we do, as much as we can, work together and make sure that we're briefing one another before we go into communities, and so I can commit to the Member to ensuring that I am having conversations with the Minister of

Infrastructure both before and after his visit, and I look forward to hearing all about his tour up the winter road. And I can also commit to the Member that I will be meeting with Imperial Oil next month as well. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1041-20(1):
INTERNATIONALLY EDUCATED NURSES

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following from my statement earlier today, I have questions for the Minister responsible for public service.

Mr. Speaker, does the GNWT agree that internationally-educated nurses have valuable contributions to make to our healthcare system and can help stabilize our health care workforce? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes, absolutely there's no doubt that that's true. We do want to ensure, of course, that we work always with the Association of Nurses and the authority to make sure that we are meeting the best possible standards for all staffing here, but certainly aware that that is an opportunity that we want to look at, that we are finding all the best possible available staff wherever they may be from. Thank you.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate that confirmation from the Minister. So following again from my Member's statement, would the Minister commit to investigating the possibility of establishing a supervised practice experience program here in the NWT? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can certainly say that that conversation -- this wouldn't be the first time that that conversation comes to light, that myself and the Minister of Health and Social Services are both very live to this, would like to work on this. So, again, just acknowledging and wanting our frontline staff to know that I am acknowledging that they are already quite busy, but in terms of figuring out that pathway, how we can provide that opportunity and provide that service, again, absolutely happy to look into that. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplementary. Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to be 100 percent clear -- I heard a lot of words

there -- can I just get a yes? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Yeah, Mr. Speaker, I am obviously not being asked for a solution today. We're being asked to work on a solution. So yes. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1042-20(1):
INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am just going to give the Premier a moment to get back to his seat. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, can the Premier explain what plans to -- sorry, what plans exist to monitor and evaluate success or areas for improvement of service integration and ISD units as they begin to expand beyond Yellowknife to Fort Simpson, Inuvik, Hay River, and other communities? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for the question. So service integration is the umbrella term we use for our efforts to integrate services across departments and ensure that residents are able to approach the government and get the services they need without having to bounce around between different departments. Under that, we have Integrated Service Delivery Yellowknife which is what used to be called integrated case management. So I just wanted to get the terminology straight while we begin talking about this. And so to monitor and evaluate how we're doing when we roll out the service integration initiative, we are currently developing a monitoring and evaluation framework that should be done in the very near future, within the next month. And what we're going to do is use that -- we're going to test that by evaluating the Integrated Service Delivery Yellowknife site. So that's formally known as integrated case management. That site's been active for quite a while now, and it'll serve well to test out that monitoring and evaluation framework. We have integrated service teams, so service integration teams in four other communities, and as we go forward we will then be able to use that tool to monitor the progress and efficiency and effectiveness of those teams as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Premier elaborate if future plans for service integration and, indeed, those

service delivery teams will dovetail or overlap, where appropriate, with the work of EIA to strengthen relationships with NGOs that provide crucial expertise in social service delivery? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And yes, those things go hand-in-hand. Integrating services doesn't just mean integrating the GNWT services; it means integrating with our partners and those are often NGOs who deliver services across the territory that are vital to many of our residents. The Member mentioned transitional housing in her statement earlier, and I was just over at the transitional housing site by the Folk on the Rocks here and speaking with the Yellowknife Women's Society staff about how they are integrating their services and working with the GNWT, EIA, and other partners to deliver services. So we are already seeing the benefits of working more closely with NGOs and better supporting NGOs, and we fully intend to continue that work. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Premier tell me whether the -- if the success of service integration, and its predecessor ICM, would encourage EIA to increase this unit's capacity and budget into future years? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So right now we have a budget before us, and it has in it what it has in it. But with that being said, we've already -- we've recently put a lot of money into service integration, into transitional housing, into better supporting NGOs across the territory, not just here in Yellowknife, and so as we move forward the idea is that we would get better at breaking down barriers and working across departments and government, and we want to move to a place where we don't need pathfinders to work with someone to go and access individual government departments. We want to make that easier for people. So in the long run, the goal is to get to a point where we don't need teams like this anymore and hopefully doing things more efficiently and actually saving money in the long run. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Oral questions. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

QUESTION 1043-20(1):
JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE FUNDING

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of ECE.

Mr. Speaker, last year in the spring session the ECE Minister stood up and talked about the surplus from the YK 1 and 2 school boards, and that funding of \$14 million could be used to help with the shortfall of Jordan's Principle. Mr. Speaker, my question to the Minister is does the Minister believe is it appropriate for her to instruct schools on how to spend their surplus dollars rather than ensuring that she provides school-adequate funding for Indigenous students herself? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the dollars that school boards do have come from dollars appropriated from this House for the purpose of delivering education. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So far stop-gap funding has been totally inadequate. Is the Minister telling Indigenous families she does not have enough money to fully fund their children's education? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the funding that's appropriated by this House to education bodies across Northwest Territories is determined through the school funding formula. That school funding formula takes into account the inclusive schooling directive which is where we find a lot of the supports, like therapeutic services for example, that Jordan's Principle funding often supplements. We're in the process of reviewing the inclusive schooling directive because we do acknowledge that the education body, our students across the Northwest Territories, and their needs have drastically changed over the course of that directive being in place. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, is the Minister confident that her government can soon reach some kind of agreement with the federal Government of Canada to help restore funding for the Indigenous students that have been cut so far this fiscal year? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I continue to advocate, with all of my Cabinet colleagues, in regards to the issue of Jordan's Principle. In addition, I've been advocating alongside Ministers, education Ministers from other jurisdictions,

especially my territorial counterparts, and will continue to do so. And at the same time, we are reviewing our inclusive schooling directive as well as making sure that I am reaching back into education bodies in regards to our support assistants initiative to find out if that works for them or not. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1044-20(1):
DIABETES PREVENTION, DETECTION
AND CARE

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Social Services.

I want to ask the Minister what specific public awareness initiatives are currently being delivered to help Northerners understand the risks, symptoms, and prevention strategies related to diabetes? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, throughout the Northwest Territories, the health authorities lead this work. The department works with them and, you know, if there's funding that they can access through federal funding, that they obtain through that. However, the authorities have their health promotion arm where that is where community health representatives, public health, all of those different areas, primary care providers, so your first response to -- or your first access to care would be through your primary care provider. In the small communities, it would be your health centre nurse that would be able to diagnose chronic diseases. And in the Northwest Territories, you know, we have diabetes, we have heart disease, we have cancer, we have chronic airway disease, and there's many different areas that we're trying to focus on in providing the information to be able to provide the health promotion to the communities. Thank you.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, Mr. Speaker, thank you. So if that is the case, then why diabetes and other chronic disease are on the rise if they are working, doing something about it though, in small communities. So I want to ask the Minister how much funding is being allocated directly to diabetes-specific awareness and prevention efforts, and how does the department determine the level of investment needed given that approximately 20 percent of NWT residents are affected? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there was a chronic disease framework that was completed. And to implement that, the department is currently -- in the proposed budget, there's some staffing resources in there to implement that budget. However, to get to more specifics, and because I knew that the question was coming, I broke it down for the Member for TCSA. So within each authority in each region, they all work with the communities to see what their priorities are. And within the TCSA, diabetes has been highlighted. And so to better -- TCSA is working collaboratively with the Tlicho government to increase diabetes awareness. So they are trying to address these gaps. And there has been some funding that has gone directly to support a diabetes land-based program for \$150,000. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was speaking for the whole of the Northwest Territories. There's 9,400 people that are affected. I wasn't speaking specifically for Tlicho region, but thank you for the information.

So what new or upcoming policy measures, partnerships, or community-driven programs is the department pursuing to reduce diabetes rates and improve long-term outcomes for the approximately 9,400 residents, as I currently said, currently living with diabetes or pre-diabetes? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, within the whole of the territory, this is where primary care reform is the leading area of this. It's access to care. I've said it on the floor of this House many times, you know, we have the challenges over the years of access to care. And so people need to know how to access care and where is the appropriate -- and that's what implementing this framework is going to do for chronic disease management. It's going to give everyone a roadmap as to how to access the certain different areas in their region to be able to deal with these things. However, by accessing your primary care -- so if you're in a small community, if you're in -- you access your -- you know, go through your team, go through your nurse, they can make referrals to the dietician. There are community wellness programs that happen. They do prenatal programs for women that are pregnant in the communities. Public health goes out and does different education. There are programs within the school for kids. So there's multiple different arms of trying to improve living healthier lifestyles in the

Northwest Territories, and that's through the health promotion arm of the -- or through the department and the authorities. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1045-20(1):
RENTAL OFFICE AND RESIDENTIAL
TENANCIES ACT

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I want to ask questions about the rental office and the Residential Tenancies Act. There's been no shortage of criticism here, including from the other side of the House very publicly. So I'd like to ask the Minister of Justice, is the Minister able to issue policy guidance to the rental officer in the same manner as to the public utilities board or other independent bodies that are still empowered by territorial statute? Thank you.

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

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the rental office is a statutory office and is beyond my ability to provide direction to that office. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that's the case. If the decisions of the rental officer are contravening the Residential Tenancies Act, what remedies are available to applicants outside of appealing it at the Supreme Court? Which is costly, takes the court's time. The rental officer is not abiding by the Act. What is the Minister -- how does the Minister propose to solve that problem? Thank you.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am unable to speak on the floor about items that are directly in front of the rental officer. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. TESTART: He could have also said that's hypothetical so I can't answer it. But the point is there's significant concerns coming here. So when is this Minister going to update and modernize the RTA so it's very clear -- it takes a side essentially. Because right now it's up to total interpretation of the rental officer. We're giving far too much latitude. And the decisions that are being made are not helping communities, and that's what we're here to do. So when will the Minister actually take action,

stop talking about it, and fix this problem with the RTA?

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Residential Tenancies Act is currently under review and recommendations will come forward which we will review and look to implement in the not-too-distant future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Justice. Oral questions. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

QUESTION 1046-20(1):
ARCTIC SOVEREIGNTY AND SECURITY

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

Mr. Speaker, I said in my Member's statement talking about putting capacity where it's needed most with the amount of infrastructure being brought forward with Inuvik being one of the operational hubs selected. Can the Premier, you know, speak to what, if any, their staffing plan they put together to ensure that we do have certainly boots on the ground there for this important infrastructure? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The investments that the Government of Canada has announced towards our national security in the Northwest Territories are significant, and we recognize that they present a significant opportunity for the people of the territory. We want to ensure that we capture any opportunities that come with these investments, whether that's construction or ongoing O and M contracts that we might be able to get, and we need to ensure that we're all working together and we're all coordinated. And to date, I personally have actually found it difficult to get coordinated because so much has happened in such a short amount of time, and there are relationships with the Department of National Defence that they have with the Town of Inuvik, with the City of Yellowknife, with other entities, and so what we're doing is looking at how we can organize ourselves internally so that there is a single point of contact that will understand and be aware of everything that's happening in the territory and then be able to ensure that what we need to do on our end to ensure we're maximizing benefits actually happens. So we're at the early days of putting something together to figure that structure out. But in the meantime there are meetings with the GNWT. The deputy minister just met with the Town of Inuvik, the City of Yellowknife, DND. So there are things happening, but we want to ensure there's more

structure around it because it is such a large investment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you. And it is early days, and I certainly appreciate that, and I know that the Premier has been engaged with what's happening around the DND investment. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, was the Premier aware that DND were doing a town hall in Inuvik on April 17th? And if so, do we have someone lined up to ensure that we are at that event as well? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I became personally aware today when the Member told me, but I was not previously aware of that. That being said, I am not sure if there is someone lined up to attend that, but we certainly have staff in Inuvik and we can line someone up to ensure they attend that. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Final Supplementary. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, it's on the town's Facebook website too now so it is a public meeting.

One last question. Given the structure the Premier talked about, what they're looking at -- I get that. They're looking at how -- the one point of contact. Can the Premier commit that if this one point of contact is going to be in Yellowknife that we have a senior position as well attached to that in Inuvik, whether that's an ADM or some senior position, to ensure that decisions being made in that region are being looked at by someone in the region itself? Mr. Speaker, thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate the Member raising this early on in the process so that as we look to design some sort of a structure, we have that type of input. I agree that Yellowknife is a long way from the Beaufort Delta. We need to ensure we know what's going on on the ground there. But that being said, I don't want to commit to something here on the floor of the House without some careful examination and some further discussions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1047-20(1):
SUPPORTS FOR UNHOUSED
ENCAMPMENTS

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions will focus to the Minister of housing, responsible for homelessness. Mr. Speaker, in short, citizens are not feeling safe in the community, and they're very frustrated.

They have to worry about damaged property, things being stolen, and certainly their personal safety when they walk by or near these types of encampments.

Mr. Speaker, the question really boils down to is with room at the shelters that provide services and support to these types of people in these challenges, what supports is the NWT Housing Corporation providing directly to these encampments? And if the Minister would help illuminate this House with the specifics of the types of supports they're directly supplying the encampments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you to the Member for the question. In terms of supports for the encampments, Housing NWT does not provide any material supports at this time. We do provide counselling advice, supports, and also discussions with the encampment folks, offering them to move over to the shelters, working with our shelter operators. So there's ongoing discussions but in terms of supports, Housing NWT does not provide those supports at this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there is room at the shelters -- okay, that's important -- and there's a real public concern around this particular issue, why is the government not working to clean up these shelters -- or sorry, these encampments and move folks to the shelters given that we have a vacancy at -- safe space at the shelters? And the point, ultimately, is people are concerned about the spaces when the government is demonstrating inaction. Thank you.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is not -- is providing action, not not demonstrating action. I find that statement not true. And I just want to be clear that Housing NWT is leading with homelessness, the homelessness file, the encampments. And it's a very difficult file, Mr. Speaker, and we can't force people to move into shelters. They're welcome to encamp or camp on Commissioner's land, and we provide that support and advice. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this government could do something with respect to the encampments and, again, given that there's space at the shelters.

Mr. Speaker, the long one sentence is the government needs to stop straddling the fence

on this particular issue; therefore, would the government help take back the streets by exercising actual action in cleaning up these encampment spaces, which there are a multitude, and would the government finally make a decision to get behind this initiative? Thank you.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Housing NWT is a social agency so we provide social supports, especially to those that are living in encampments or living in shelters. This issue is more of an enforcement issue so I suggest the question go to the City of Yellowknife, the RCMP, or any other criminal agency. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1048-20(1):
INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING AND LITERACY IN
THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have further questions for the Minister of Education.

The Minister has put a lot of emphasis on the inclusive schooling review which is to be released soon, and inclusive schooling has tended to focus on providing accommodations to students who are struggling. One key recommendation in the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read report was that accommodations should not be used as a substitute for teaching kids to read.

So my first question to the Minister, is there anything in the current inclusive schooling directive or handbook that specifies that accommodations such as assistive technologies, like computers, are not to be used as a substitute for teaching kids to read? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So in short, yes, accommodations help students access learning but do not replace teaching children to read. So teachers can, for example, pair accommodations with classroom instruction and then, where needed, target more intensive interventions. These assistive technologies, Mr. Speaker, are meant to complement teaching and intervention, but are not a standalone solution. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I am glad to hear that, although I haven't seen that statement specifically in the inclusive schooling directive. I am wondering if the

Minister can tell us if there's anything in the inclusive schooling directive or handbook that provides guidance, then, on what proven methods teachers should be using to teach children to read who may have dyslexia or other learning disabilities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, inclusive schooling in the Northwest Territories uses a tiered responsive model, which means it starts with good teaching for everyone, and then from there you add in small group help when needed, provide extra one-on-one supports to students who need it more, so getting a tiered approach that allows teachers to kind of narrow in to smaller groups as students need it but starting with the larger cohort to begin with. The new adapted curriculum, Mr. Speaker, itself incorporates foundational early learning components that align with evidence-based approaches that are identified as well in the Right to Read report that the Member referenced in her Member statements and previous questions as well. And it's important to note, Mr. Speaker, that the inclusive schooling review and the department's response will help shape clearer territorial direction on early literacy instruction and intervention to ensure that we're consistently applying things across the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does ECE provide any guidance to schools on when to seek a costly psychoeducational assessment by a professional when a student is struggling versus when to first try science-based instructional methods that have been proven to result in breakthroughs for specific reading challenges? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, while there are assessments that take a deeper look at how a student learns, there are lots of instances where an assessment of this nature isn't necessarily needed. Schools are really encouraged to act early and not wait, and teachers are encouraged to provide additional classroom and small group support as soon as a concern emerges with a student. And students don't need a diagnosis in order for teachers to make that available to students in their schools or in their classrooms, and a formal diagnosis is not required for accommodations or intervention for a student. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1049-20(1):
FUTURE PLANS FOR YELLOWKNIFE
AIRPORT TERMINAL

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am going to turn to the Minister of Infrastructure now for a few questions. Mr. Speaker, what is the functional life left on the Yellowknife airport terminal? There's been lots of talk about airport development. I am just curious if the Minister has an answer on that. Thank you.

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

HON. VINCE McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, let's just say it's at its end of life. That terminal was built in the early 1960s. I so happen to fly home every once in a while, and there's actually a picture of the original airport in one of the terminals, one of the exit ways there. It's actually pretty interesting. But it is at end of life. It's been added on numerous times. So, you know, the building has done its work and a lot of the work's being done to plan for future development. So it is at end of life, and we've obviously got to keep that going with the developments that are going on, so there is work being done to also look at updating it temporarily, obviously, because there are plans to move ahead with other things. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, continuing with the airport, are there amenities, features, or needs that the current terminal already cannot accommodate? Thank you.

HON. VINCE McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it goes without saying, you know, when there's peak times there it's pretty busy. I think everybody has acknowledged that. When you have a certain amount of jets on the apron there, you know, it's at capacity. So there is a lot of, you know, things that have, you know, not being able to do what we can do there. There's also issues with the washrooms, and there's some work going forward to try to accommodate that. So although the facility has reached end of life and the area is at age, a lot of work is being done to help maintain the facility and the grounds while we're operating it still. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Final supplementary. Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate these insights from the Minister. So the next obvious question here, of course, is knowing that the facility is out of sight when will a solution be brought forward in the five-year capital plan for the airport? Thank you.

HON. VINCE McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's plans in place to get this moving ahead but obviously with all the developments recently of the Department of National Defence investing in the area, there's a lot of work being done, it's had to, you know, kind of slow down a little bit to wait for the Department of National Defence. But, again, working closely with the Department of National Defence, plans are coming along to bring more plans, more stable plans, more, you know, financial plans to the whole strategic plan for the area. So hopefully we'll have something here relatively soon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1050-20(1):
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES NOMINEE
PROGRAM

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of ECE. As she knows, I am very passionate about the NWT nominee program. Can the Minister please tell me what is the anticipated 2026 allocation for spaces in the nominee program? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the federal government has awarded the Northwest Territories 197 spaces. Thank you.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell me when the nominee program will open for 2026? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the nominee program will open in March of 2026. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when will further details on the 2026 intake be available for my constituents, including an actual March day? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the program details will be announced on February 18th, which is Wednesday of this week, and that March day will be available then as well. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1051-20(1):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES EFFORTS TO SECURE
FEDERAL EDUCATION FUNDING

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Right now it is my understanding that the Premier is working with the Council of Leaders to push the northern agenda in Ottawa. The question is how is the Premier advocating to Ottawa in the run up to the federal budget to ensure any kind of funding to ensure Indigenous students receive an adequate education in the Northwest Territories? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Mr. Premier.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very familiar with Jordan's Principle. I previously served as the Minister of education, and I know people in the system who've taught prior to Jordan's Principle, during Jordan's Principle, and since then, and so I am very familiar with the circumstances and the impact it's having on students and teachers in classrooms. And so because of that, every time I am in Ottawa, every time I speak to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Northern Affairs, whoever it may be, I raise this issue with them and how important it is. Last time, or one of the previous times I met the Prime Minister, I highlighted it. I said this is the issue that keeps me up at night. If you take any issue in the territory, this is the one. And so I've been very clear and very direct that the territories are being impacted differently than the rest of Canada. And given our demographics, our history, there's no reason why the same Jordan's Principle program needs to be administered in the provinces as the territories. While the feds are trying to figure out what they want to do to fix the problems that arose in the provinces, I think there's an easy way that they can say okay, in the territories, we're going to go back to doing what we were doing before. It seemed to work. We didn't see big abuses the way we saw in the rest of Canada. And so there's an easy solution, and I've transmitted that to them as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government now obviously prefers to work on Jordan's Principle funding with Indigenous governments. Can the Premier let us know how is he supporting and coordinating with Indigenous governments to ensure funding for Indigenous education across NWT be handled, especially working with school boards? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I think the work with the Council of Leaders is very important to distinguish ourselves from what's happening in the provinces where there was a sense that the provincial governments were offloading their responsibility to the school board -- or to Jordan's Principle. So it's a much different situation here in the territory. We advocate jointly with Indigenous leaders. I believe there's opportunities for Indigenous governments to actually apply for Jordan's Principle and then help support students and other families that way. That type of work, I understand, is happening around the territory. So there's lots of work to be done in partnership with Indigenous governments, and we're travelling that path. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Final supplementary. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, earlier in this session the Premier told this chamber that his government is upholding treaty rights. Is he telling Ottawa to fund Indigenous education for him to uphold his own treaty right obligations here in the Northwest Territories? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I didn't quite get the question, I didn't quite understand, But I am advocating to Ottawa to uphold the ruling that requires them to fund Jordan's Principle. I try to educate federal Ministers about the history of the territory, how we came about, the responsibilities that the federal government has to the territory, how we're different from provinces, how we're different from reserves. So I do my best to provide the overall context so that Ministers can understand how this fits into the support the federal government has pledged to provide to Indigenous peoples and how Jordan's Principle is an integral component of that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1052-20(1):
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES NOMINEE
PROGRAM

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on the nominee program my question is, is 197 spots that we just heard about enough to meet the NWT's economic demand for this program? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. I would ask what the Minister is going to do about it, but I think she's had that opportunity. In the past, NTNP often opened in January of every year which set a rhythm for temporary workers' permits expiring in February and March. The NTNP has not yet opened. We know it's opening next month. How will the Minister support all prospective applicants who now can't apply when it eventually does open, because of this lag? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, last year we had three separate allotments awarded to the Northwest Territories from the federal government. So we started off at the very beginning of the year where on January 16th of 2025, we learned that our allotment had been cut in half. From there, we received two additional allotments throughout the year. The last one was awarded to us in the very last quarter. This meant that we had a decision to make. We either had staff prepare for our program for 2026, or we worked in order to make sure that we were processing those applications. The decision was made to ensure that we weren't losing out on prospective applicants to the Northwest Territories nominee program, and so we prioritized those applications. That means that our program this year, which is going to look much different so that we can maximize benefits to the labour needs of the Northwest Territories, will open in March of 2026.

I've also let the federal government know that having frequent allotments throughout the year and kind of changing the goalposts has meant that we can't be as strategic as we want to be, we can't plan like we want to be, and has an impact both to staff morale and also our ability to react here in the Northwest Territories as a smaller jurisdiction. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I agree with the Minister it was a boneheaded move from Ottawa, and I am glad -- and I hope

it doesn't happen again and we can have certainty with this program. The question remains for people whose permits are expiring, they are going to be -- potentially have to leave the Northwest Territories because they can't get access to this program. Will the Minister prioritize those applicants who applied in January of last year, got their permits, and are now expiring? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to releasing the details of the program on Wednesday, on February 18th. That said, Mr. Speaker, there is going to be more demand for this program than what we have spaces for. We know this already. We knew this last year as well. This is going to be a challenge clear across Canada. I've heard from all of my immigration Minister counterparts how cuts to the program are going to impact their economic potential and their workforce needs in every province across this country. The Northwest Territories shares those concerns, and we continue to advocate to the federal government. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1053-20(1):
REMEDIATION OF UNHOUSED
ENCAMPMENTS

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to target my questions to the Minister of ECC.

Mr. Speaker, not just recently but repeatedly I've been told by tourism operators how embarrassed they are to take international tourists to the museum area, park in front of where the encampment is, where we showcase our northern history, culture, our best of our best, Mr. Speaker. Given that, that there's spaces and openings and opportunities in the current shelter network, what is ECC finally doing to clean up those spaces, those public spaces? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the spaces that the Member is referring to is Commissioner's land, and under the Commissioner's Land Act, there's nothing preventing people from camping on Commissioner's land. Having said that, we've been working very closely with housing and other organizations within the city of Yellowknife to go do inspections, identify if there are safety concerns, and assist with other

enforcement agencies to address those. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, that's a great answer for this person's fault and that person's fault, and no one seems to be taking responsibility other than pointing to someone else. Mr. Speaker, given that we had a terrible fire there, we have garbage, we have theft, we have a whole lot of other types of problems, Mr. Speaker, citizens are retrieving their personal properties there, Mr. Speaker. That said, what would it take for ECC to finally step up and address this particular problem, especially because we have spaces in our shelters that can facilitate these folks? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the folks involved are camping on Commissioner's land. Under the Commissioner's Land Act, residents of the Northwest Territories have the ability to camp on Commissioner's land. We do not have the authority to remove those people from that land if they choose to camp there. I am very happy to continue to work with the department of health and the department of housing to try and encourage people to take advantage of the opportunities that we have created. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, maybe the Minister has a different definition of camping. Mr. Speaker, could the Minister enlighten this House the difference between encampments with big stovepipes and tents and all those kinds of things versus the traditional camping that most of us understand. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the difference in the definition would be between a permanent and a non-permanent structure. So a tent is not considered a permanent structure under the definition. I think that as you look at whether it's a canvas tent with a stove or it's a pup tent with a fly, a tent is a tent. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1054-20(1):
STATUS OF WINTER ROAD RESUPPLY TO
FORT GOOD HOPE HOUSING PROJECTS

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of housing, and I've got to compliment the Minister of housing and the Minister of ITI previous in supporting the negotiated resupply contract for the Fort Good Hope Construction Centre. Now that we're into that year of mobilization, winter road season, can the Minister provide an update in this situation, the client assisting the contractor, the NDL contractor in Fort Good Hope, on materials coming over the winter road? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Member for the question.

In terms of working with NDL and the client in assisting for materials over the winter road, what we're hoping with Housing NWT is that we work in coordination to make sure that all materials required for the Fort Good Hope Construction Centre, working with the client and working with the business itself, that they make -- that all materials make the winter road and that's a priority. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second last question to the Minister is will the Minister provide my office with a progress update on mobilization of materials so we can get our young people employed this coming summer construction season. Mahsi cho.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, Mr. Speaker, we're willing to work together with the MLA to provide this important information. I think that updates with dates and times available is good information to share, that he could share to community and businesses along the way. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1055-20(1):
YELLOWKNIFE AIRPORT ALIGNMENT
WITH DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL
DEFENCE PROCUREMENT

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Infrastructure mentioned the DND procurement. I just wanted to follow up further a little bit on that. As we know, DND has a pre-procurement that's gone out publicly. Mr. Speaker, does that procurement align with the work to modernize the airport that the Minister was speaking to

earlier that has been going on now for at least a couple of years. Thank you.

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

HON. VINCE McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So far, with the departments working together with DND, everything is aligning. You know, they've been working hand-in-hand to make sure that everything is going to work together. This has been going on for a while. You know, they've been working with the Department of Infrastructure for fully utilizing their land use plan for the strategic planning of YZF area. So, yeah, for now, it is working, and we'll continue to work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, does the Yellowknife airport have enough land for any kind of meaningful expansion? I know that the DND has talked about a fair number of things, so I am curious if we even have land available to do so. Thank you.

HON. VINCE McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, currently we do. I mean, obviously if there's bigger and better plans that come along with all the developments going on, it may not. But as it currently stands, there is enough room. You know, it's a little tight in some areas when you're dealing with cargo and stuff and, you know, different sizes of aircrafts. But currently, as it stands there is enough room within the area. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Ty, Minister of Infrastructure. Final supplementary. Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just want to confirm with the Minister are all these parties who are planning out this development in the same room making plans, how often are they meeting? If the Minister can share any details with the House, I am sure Yellowknifers are -- and people in the NWT are interested to hear it. Thank you.

HON. VINCE McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So all these plans have been going on for quite a while, long before my time, so it goes back to 2022. And, you know, obviously with the new development of, you know, the plans for building up the YZF airport, you know, there's been lots of work going on there so there's been public engagement that's been done with the area and for the people who use the airport. So a lot of the work that's been going on has determined that there is enough room. And until something otherwise from the Department of National Defence and infrastructure, currently everything is working as planned. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Mr. Clerk.

Follow-up to Oral Questions

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu)
Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Rule 7.2 (7)(2), I received follow-up information for Oral Question 934 from the first session of the 20th Legislative Assembly. 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 is up for oral questions. Oral questions. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of committee on the review of bills. Member from Frame Lake.

Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills

BILL 35:

MISCELLANEOUS STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT 2026,
MOVED INTO COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, your committee would like to report on its consideration of Bill 35, Miscellaneous Statute Law Amendment Act 2026.

Bill 35 received second reading in the Legislative Assembly on October 31st, 2025, and was referred to the standing committee of Government Operations for review. The standing committee completed its clause-by-clause review of the bill with the Minister of Justice on February 16th, 2026.

Mr. Speaker, the committee reports that Bill 35, Miscellaneous Statute Law Amendment Act 2026, is ready for consideration in Committee of the Whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Bill 35 stands referred to the Committee of the Whole. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Tabling of documents. Member from Yellowknife North.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 470-20(1):
LETTER DATED FEBRUARY 13, 2026,
FROM CHAIRS OF BOARD OF TRUSTEES
OF YELLOWKNIFE EDUCATION DISTRICT
NO. 1 AND YELLOWKNIFE CATHOLIC
SCHOOLS REGARDING URGENT FUNDING
FOR JK-12 INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table correspondence dated February 13th, 2026, from the Chairs of the Board of Trustees of Yellowknife Education District No. 1 and Yellowknife Catholic Schools regarding an Urgent Funding Request for JK to 12 Indigenous Students. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Motions. Notices of motion for first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Second Reading of Bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, with the Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh in the Chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I am going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Sorry, I am getting ahead of myself here.

I now call the Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of the committee? I will go to the Member from 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, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. We'll take a short recess, 15 minutes. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 448-20(1), 2026-2027 Main Estimates. We will now consider the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Does the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment wish to bring witnesses into the House?

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: I do, Mr. Chair.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

Would the Minister please introduce her witnesses.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, on my left I have Jamie Fulford, deputy minister of education, culture and employment. And on my right, I have Terry-Lynn Locke-Sutter, assistant deputy minister of education, culture and employment for corporate services.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay. Committee, we will defer the department summary and review the estimates by activity summary, beginning with corporate management, starting at page 34 and information items on page 36. Are there any questions?

I will go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In the update to the business plan for the 2026-2027 year, it notes that the legislative initiative for the creation of a polytechnic has been paused. Can the Minister speak to why that is and what next steps will be. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the efforts under the legislation for a Polytechnic University Act have not been paused. That work is still underway. There is a matter of the accreditation process with the Campus Alberta Quality Assurance -- thank you -- Quality Council that needs to happen in order for the legislation to go through and for us to be ready for that. And Aurora College has hit the first milestone where CAQC has traveled to the Northwest Territories, and they are now working with CAQC on the requirements as part of that process. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And as the Minister knows, and she has graciously offered to sit down and meet with me soon, the legislative initiative for the Archives Act is no longer on the initiatives list, and I am wondering if she can provide some substantiation around that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we as a government have endeavored to ensure that we are prioritizing the legislative priorities of the 20th Assembly and so making sure that we are putting resources to the legislation that needs to get done first. And so as the Member indicated, certainly willing to sit down and have conversations both with officials and myself in regards to the Archives Act. And I can also confirm for the Member that the work in the back end with officials is still continuing but that this piece of legislation, as far as drafting is concerned, will not be a priority piece of legislation for this Assembly. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And further to one more legislative initiative in the business plan update, the Employment Standards Act, could the Minister provide an update on when the House is anticipated to see a bill. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the House will see that bill in the May-June session. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Nothing else for me.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Is there any further questions from Members? I will go to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Sorry, this is a similar question the Member from Great Slave asked, but I am noting that currently, as the schedule lays it out, the polytechnic is now set to launch in 2027 but the schedule seems to be showing that legislation for the polytechnic wouldn't be complete until 2028. Can the Minister help us understand that alignment better?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, as I explained before we needed to ensure -- or need to ensure that the CAQC process with Aurora

College is completed before we have a piece of legislation that's enacted to ensure that we are incorporating anything that is -- that comes out of that process into the legislation. So education, culture and employment is working on the content of that legislation parallel to the CAQC process unfolding with Aurora College, and it is the intention to, as soon as we can, parallel to that process, bring forward a bill -- well, first a legislative proposal, Mr. Chair, and then a bill to this House. And so it is earmarked in the 2027-2028 year so that it aligns with the end of this Assembly and what, in theory, was predicted to be the timeline of the CAQC process. But we don't have control over that process, so we're ensuring that we are as prepared as we can be on our side, and we're working closely with the president and chair of Aurora College at the same time. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Is there any reason to think that CAQC process could end earlier than expected? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, certainly there are some positive indications coming out of where that process is so far. I understand that Aurora College intends to share some of that process in the spring this year, and that will give us an indication of what those timelines will look like. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so can the Minister just help us understand -- I mean, let's say the college gets that done sooner than we expected, you know, do we have a piece of legislation that's ready to get the Polytechnic Act in place as soon as possible once the college is ready to make that transition? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So we don't have a piece of legislation that is sitting on a shelf, per se, ready to go. There has been work done in the background as far as what pieces of existing legislation would need to be imported into new legislation, so what parts of the Aurora College Act would still stand. And in addition, Mr. Chair, there's work that's been done to look at the pieces of legislation from other jurisdictions across the Canada -- or -- across Canada -- my

goodness -- across Canada, for example, in the Yukon, to make sure that we're looking at other lessons learned and other examples as well. And so work is still happening in the background, but we still need to make sure that we're working collaboratively with Aurora College in doing that. So working as quickly as possible, but we don't want to get ahead of anything here given that some of the results of the work that are being done could have an impact on what needs to be in that legislation. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wanted to turn to the Skills 4 Success program. I know that program's concluded now. But can the Minister speak to what has been done for next steps towards the success or strategy or an action plan for workforce development? Are there any metrics, successes, or lessons learned from the Skills 4 Success program that can be shared with committee? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So I will start, and then I will pass to the deputy minister.

So to start off, we've got some other engagement that is underway in the 2026 year, which is the engagement that is as a result of the redefining what adult education will look like in communities across the Northwest Territories. And so as part of that work is a great opportunity to really outline what is next steps and what is our action plan coming out of that. As far as looking back on Skills 4 Success, I'd like to pass to the deputy minister, please.

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

MR. JAMIE FULFORD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't have a whole lot more to add to that. As I think the Members are aware, we're in a phase of the growth of the Northwest Territories that is going to require different approaches. So we're, you know, taking the time to do some introspection and looking at what the suite of programs is that we offer and how they can be made to better serve to, you know, create success in our citizens. And that includes everything from apprenticeships to literacy aspects. It's all of it together. So as far as a successor program that's going to be called Skills to Success 2, no, we're not working on that right now, but we are considering the whole -- holistically the full scope of our programming. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I really appreciate that. Building upon that subject, can more information be provided as to how the department is supporting the mining workforce as mines begin to close? I know we've gotten some pretty difficult news recently, and I am just curious how we're reacting to that. What training is being offered, how are employees being engaged, how are we helping to coordinate work that's happening around the NWT that they might be able to move into? I know that, you know, when I've met with the folks who are running the Giant Mine project, for example, they've noted that they have a hard time attracting northern employment, and their northern employment numbers are similar to the mine. So there's certainly jobs available here. I am curious to hear what work ECE is doing to help line people up with that work. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'd say it's kind of in three big buckets, so to speak. So there is the work being done first on aligning people with new opportunities within similar workforces. So for example, participating actively in career fairs and making sure that we're bringing together, as best as we can, other opportunities. So a great example is working directly with Diavik, for example, and their career fairs that they did have.

The second bucket that I would draw the Member's attention to is the workforce development training. So if people are wanting to leave the career that they're in right now and train for a new one, making sure that they're aligned with both training opportunities, whether it's in trades or through student financial assistance, but then also through their employers. So we've got a suite of workforce development program funding where employers can access dollars for jobs that they want to be able to transition their staff members into or if they, as an employer, are looking to transition maybe from diamond mining to, for example, Giant Mine. And then the third bucket of that would be for people who are wanting to branch out on their own, maybe step away from both mining and working for other people and really start their own entrepreneurship. And so there's a suite of programs also through industry, tourism and investment, and also Prosper NWT, that people have access to, some in the form of grants and some in the form of loans. So those kind of three buckets have been our key focuses. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I just wanted to note that with the closure of CLCs that was announced by Aurora College last year, and the business plan notes that some of the laddering programs that lead to further education has shifted. Can the Minister provide more details on these shifts that are being referred to here and maybe in a wider sense, has a longer-term vision for adult education been developed for the NWT? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, laddering programs are programs where someone can start off in one and it opens the door and provides kind of that step up into another potential level of certification so that somebody who may start off, for example, in a certificate program has a clear path forward into a diploma degree and so forth. And so it allows people to start off with smaller steps and bite-sized pieces, if you will, and to see if it's something that they enjoy doing before they want to go on to that next step.

Another example of laddering, for example, is the diploma in nursing, and then people sometimes going on into the registered nursing program from there.

As far as what is the overall plan for adult education in the Northwest Territories, that is what we are working on by engaging with Indigenous governments and communities over the course of 2026 to make sure that we are working closely with our education partners and communities and understanding what it is that people want so that we are not unilaterally making decisions without that being based on experience and knowledge and desires coming from communities across territory. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Is there any further questions from Members? I will go back to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Appreciate it if there is the time for it.

Mr. Chair, I just wanted to continue the line of questioning I had going on the laddering programs and just thinking about adult education. And I just know, you know, when I've met with the president of Dechinta University, she's spoken passionately about the work that Dechinta could do throughout our communities,

which would help bridge students into Aurora College.

And to give a bit of context about what I was asking about, I mean, when I started meeting with Dechinta, it was talking about, you know, would you want to grow into being, you know, the university in the NWT, and they were clear with me that that wasn't their vision, that they feel that there's a place for Aurora College to be or the Aurora university, or whatever we end up calling it, kind of the anchor post-secondary institution in the NWT. But the work that Dechinta could do is develop Indigenous-oriented programming which would employ elders and various different community members the way they have been doing with the small amount of funding they're getting and that they could grow that significantly with more core funding, and they could be working in many of the communities in the NWT, employing elders, and helping to build that knowledge economy that I've spoken about so much and, you know, building up the kind of employment and the research capacity and the various different things that come along with that that we've been seeing start to succeed in other jurisdictions.

So I am curious if the Minister has met with Dechinta and spoken about that possibility and whether that kind of vision could be something that could come out of our need to develop a new vision for adult education in the NWT. I am just throwing it out there that it is a possibility that's already been considered by an institution that's having success here and so would strongly encourage the Minister to look into that. So I am curious to hear what she has to say. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I am, as the Member said, a big fan of Dechinta's work and continue to be. I have had the opportunity to meet with them in the past, as have staff from education, culture and employment, and still meet with them routinely throughout the year.

In addition to that, education, culture and employment continues to fund Dechinta and certainly see them as a key education partner in the Northwest Territories and also happy to make them part of the conversation with engagements that will be happening for adult learning this year. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I will let my questions sit for now and just start to go through the budget itself. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): All right. Thank you. I will go to the Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is more on the planning for the emerging industries that are coming. So when we sit back and we look at what is coming, for example the defence spending that's coming to this community and the community of Inuvik, so I think we should survey what the market demands are going to be for skills training for those -- let's use those two projects for example, and then you also got your -- part of your succession planning, the emerging projects and reclamation economy. And I know this government has an Esso reclamation cleanup committee, but we don't hear any reports coming out of that committee that would give us confidence that we are preparing for that demand. So I really think is -- in recognition of this, and also it really was disturbing for me there when I did my road trip here last week there, the aging truck drivers that are supplying resupply to all these communities, and they're nearing retirement, so that just encourages a demand. So is the Minister and the department working on updating the Skills 4 Success and the demand from these emerging industries. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, certainly this is top of mind for the government as a whole, and whether it is Imperial and remediation work or it is, as the Member mentioned, potential for defence spending, the government and myself, as well in meetings that I am having, am pursuing timelines and workforce needs so that I can both share that with communities, ensuring I am sharing it with community education advisors, ensuring I am meeting with community leadership, and as well making sure that our education partners have that information as well from a post-secondary institution standpoint. And those timelines and workforce development plans are critically important to being able to action everybody, to being able to say okay, let's go. And so I am certainly working on that. I know the department is working on it. I know that the entire Cabinet is live to it. And this is something that we are pursuing purposefully. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I will go to the Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks to the Minister for that reply.

My next question: Will the Minister incorporate this into the business plan for the remaining term of this Assembly for the simple fact that we just heard about the Esso closure announcement and the next phase is going to be reclamation? And the same thing with the DND airport expansion, we just heard about that. So those emerging demands for employment and training and skills should be incorporated in our plan. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I agree that it's important to make sure that we are transparent and that we are reporting on what we can. As far as, you know, what those items will exactly be that can be reported in real time in the business plan, I'd have to come back to the Member. As all of this stuff kind of comes together on the back end, we're very much in real time here. But certainly happy to make sure that I am asking those questions about what can be incorporated and how we can ensure that we are transparently reporting on our successes as well. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I will go to the Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Nothing further, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, has the department engaged with any of the post-secondary institutions on developing micro-credentials, micro-credential accreditation, for post-secondary offerings from private colleges? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, there are some post-secondary institutions in the Northwest Territories that are pursuing micro-credentialing and that are looking at different kinds of micro-clusters for business that are happening in different regions and are also tapping into what leadership in different regions are wanting to see as micro-clusters for those businesses and pursuing plans of how they can work together on those. So yes. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's good. My understanding is this will require some legislative and policy change -- or let's just say policy change that may include legislation, regulatory or accreditation bodies. So are we -- what work does the department have to do to ensure micro-credentials are available as course offerings by these colleges? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you so much. So, Mr. Chair, none of our post-secondary partners have brought to me a need for legislative change for them to be able to offer micro-credentialing. We have a process that was born out of the last Assembly where we accredit programs to make sure that the piece of paper that they get is valuable not just in the Northwest Territories but also outside the borders of the territory as well. That's incredibly important when students are giving their time and dollars and pursuing post-secondary education. So we accredit under the existing Post-Secondary Education Act, but no further changes that are needed have been brought to my attention. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the Minister for the response. So I know I am skipping ahead, but not every institution in the Northwest Territories has the benefit of a guaranteed 30-plus million dollars a year. Most, all of them have to test the market for their course offerings and compete for students across the country, across the world in some cases. So the idea of a micro-credentialed course is if you're a smaller college with less capacity -- and that's every one of the Northwest Territories except for Aurora College -- then you may need to build up programs rather than just offering them all at once. So a micro-credentialed course allows limited offerings to test the market for what's possible and more -- and just as important, to synergize with other programs. So, for example, you could enter into an agreement with Aurora College to say a portion of your business diploma can be done through -- can include micro-credentialed courses from other institutions that will support that core service or that core program delivery, and then they can build on that once they bring more students into their programs, more dollars into their institutions, and more capacity. Because right now, a lot of the funding is contribution funding which means educators in these colleges are having to write grant applications rather than focus on teaching. So that's why this is

important. Hopefully, I've stated that clearly. But when the Minister says that she has not heard this concern, is that the Minister saying personally or the department has not heard this concern? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, this concern has not been brought to my attention, but I am more than happy to pass to the deputy minister.

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

MR. JAMIE FULFORD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It has not been brought to my attention either. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. Well, it's been brought to my attention so that's interesting. I will have to go back to the institution I was having conversations with and see if there's -- why it hasn't moved along.

Will the Minister be willing to proactively approach institutions about micro-credentials and see if there's interest? Like I said, this will help expand our market offerings for -- or build up the capacity of private institutions to support our public institution and build a network of -- well, build a knowledge economy. So will the Minister proactively pursue this idea of micro-credentials with other -- with private post-secondary institutions in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, over the course of the last month I've met with three different post-secondary institutions from the NWT, and I am keen to continue those relationships. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Okay. Well, maybe over the course of those meetings, the Minister could raise this directly rather than waiting for them to raise it. I think they've got a lot on their minds when it comes to in the case of -- well, when it comes to all of them. Like, core funding needs are huge, and that's probably top of mind rather than the other stuff. So, anyway, I will leave that with the Minister.

And there's also a situation where Aurora College has signed off on kind of an agreement to work with all the institutions -- sorry, all of them have entered into an MOU to collaboratively develop programs and support each other to grow the knowledge economy in the Northwest Territories. Primarily, most of these institutions are based in the North Slave, so that's where the kind of epicentre of it is growing outwards. But, of course, that could include Inuvik and Fort Smith as the infrastructure is there. But, apparently, that MOU hasn't been acted on, so can the Minister -- again, this is an area of policy development. It would be helpful if the departmental officials were also keeping an eye on this and helping coordinate post-secondary activities across the board and ensuring that there's collaboration and everyone has the capacity to meet each other. Like I said, everyone's -- even Aurora College has its own capacity challenges. So can the department step in, help coordinate those efforts so we can collaboratively build the knowledge economy between all these parties? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, absolutely, yes, I've previously made a commitment to bring everyone that is involved in the post-secondary landscape in the Northwest Territories together so that they can collaborate on multiple faces of things that they would like to pursue together. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. Can the Minister also look into the status of the MOU and just see when the last meeting was done, what was accomplished, all that kind of stuff. I think, although it's between independent parties, having that conversation might spark a discussion that could lead to some growth around these issues like micro-credentials or ways to collaborate. So can the Minister look in specifically to that MOU? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you to the Minister. No further questions.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay. Implementation of Indigenous language action plan, that's in the business plan. I just want to ask the Minister -- I mean, well, I am kind of quite surprised Dechinta University has been around for quite some time and they're not flourishing, you know. And I think it would have been good because lately we've been talking about language, the Indigenous language, and I went to the opening of the language symposium in Behchoko and they talked about the importance of our language, preserving and speaking it, and a lot of them are saying that it needs to start from the house, from your -- you know, our house, our home. It needs to come from the home, so -- and I think Dechinta University -- I do support them because I know that they provide a lot of good. I know some of our students, some of our young people went through that before moving on to a major post-secondary, and then some of them are doing good. And I think they should have been doing more and knowing that they've been around longer than some of the recent post-secondary in Yellowknife here.

So with reference to implement Indigenous language action plan, so there's two things that you identify, the revitalizations and provide access to public services in the NWT. And there's another one that you mentioned, to achieve change in relationship action plan. So I just wanted to ask the Minister who were involved -- like, to achieve this, I would like to ask the Minister who were involved to advocate in developing the action plan for the revitalization of the Indigenous language. It's outlined in your business plan. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the action plan was developed extensively, I believe, in the 18th Assembly and would have been developed with -- by engaging with multiple stakeholders across the NWT. I can let the Member know that Indigenous language revitalization is something that we, in the 20th Assembly, talk about consistently at our bilaterals with all Indigenous governments, and this remains a top priority, again, in this Assembly. Even though the Indigenous languages action plan has sunset this year, we are renewing the approach in collaboration with Indigenous governments and doing extensive engagement over the next couple of years on this, and we're making sure that this is a very holistic approach.

One of the things that we hear about consistently when we're working, you know, for example with our official languages board, is concern around duplication of efforts because a lot of the funding that goes out right now from the GNWT goes directly to Indigenous governments, and one of the things that I hear often is that sometimes the official languages advocates or the languages advocates in communities want to ensure that the programs that are offered are offered really, you know, on the ground in the community with the people who are the language champions in communities. And so making sure that we're involving absolutely everyone in that approach is going to be our focus this year and next, for sure. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. I know that -- well, times have changed from the 18th and many years passed, so the stats, it's not the same from that time to now. So yes, it would be nice to revisit. Because I know this has been talked about, part of the revitalizations. And I know that because of the residential school, a lot of our students -- a lot of our older generations, they don't speak the language, and that has been a problem for many years. It's been identified. So not just now, but when we go out to the communities, a lot of people have been saying the interpreters/translators program, and we've said it quite a few times here too as well. And it's not in here, part of the -- in the revitalizations, you know. Because with the interpreter/translators, they do transcribe. So that's very important, you know, to speak and write in the language. That's part of preserving it. And that's good for the elementary school children too, you know. And I think, you know, like, that is good for the school and it's also -- and I know this is where the Dechinta -- it's -- when I look at Dechinta University, it's an Indigenous, and it's Indigenous focus. And across Canada, there's quite a few Indigenous post-secondary, and I think, you know -- I don't want to miss an opportunity here where Dechinta University can maybe do more within their programs by providing interpreters/translators program with a cultural and language. I think they should be given the opportunity. So I am not too sure if it's in your action plan but, you know, from 2018 to now, it's, like, it's -- times have changed. So it would be nice to identify that in there.

Interpreter/translators, it's not in the budget. I know we've been saying that, you know, there's pilot projects starting, you know, like, pilot projects for early learning and child care. Now we've ran it for four years. Now I think we need

to move on to the next one. The most important is in preserving the Indigenous language. And you -- I know that was -- in the early 1990s, the interpreters/translators program was offered in Fort Smith at Aurora College. So that was under pilot project. So I just wanted to know, the Minister, if that program will be brought back or to do a, you know -- not do a pilot project, but maybe make it part of the Aurora College and/or Dechinta University's to offer that program. It's indefinite, you know. Like, it's -- make it part of the post-secondary program, not just a pilot project or pilot program. I would like to see that. So if there's any plan in place that the Minister is looking at or bringing some of those program back from the from the 1990s. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, I absolutely agree with the Member that we're in a very different world than we were in 2018, and that it's important that the programs that we're offering and how we're offering them evolve with the times. And so, really, we're with the Member on that one. We are working on a renewed approach in collaboration with Indigenous governments and communities on this, which is critically important.

This budget also has continuation of the mentor apprenticeship program, which every year we see increases in the number of pairs that are coming forward in order to participate in that program.

We're also seeing increases as well year over year of the Indigenous languages scholarships that education, culture and employment is awarding to students across the territory.

And for a pilot program -- and, Mr. Chair, if I've got the wrong one, I hope the Member will let me know. But we had the Indigenous languages instructor training program that was originally a pilot program in our schools, and in this budget you do also see a substantial increase to that funding line item, recognizing how critically important our Indigenous language teachers are in our school. So you do see an increase of forced growth here for that as well.

In addition -- and it's not found in this budget, it's actually found in the Legislative Assembly budget, myself and the Speaker work quite closely together given -- I agree with the Member that we need our interpreters/translators. They're sitting around here in the room right now looking at all of us and translating for us and reminding us to

speak slowly and clearly, which we very much appreciate. And, you know, the Speaker and I have an opportunity to sit down and have lunch every single sitting of the Assembly with our interpreters and translators, and they've been so generous with their time during those meetings and also their lived experience, both, you know, growing up in the North with their own experience, with their language, and their experience as interpreters and translators as well.

And so one of the things that is found in the Legislative Assembly budget is a program that also responds to that because we want to ensure that we're building up the next generation of interpreters and translators because the accessibility of what we do in this House through Indigenous languages is so critically important, both to the revitalization of language and the preservation of language and accessibility of information. So mahsi. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Is there any further questions before I move on? Seeing none, please turn to page 35.

Education, Culture and Employment, corporate management, \$14,166,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to early learning, beginning on page 37 with information items on page 39, 41. Are there any questions?

I will go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In the early learning key activity, I note most of our ELCC items are heavily dependent on federal funding, and I am curious if the Minister can explain if there is consideration, planning, etcetera, to increasing funding internally to support ELCC and daycares. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, absolutely, this line item is very heavily supported by the federal government with the introduction of the average \$10-a-day Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. Those agreements were distributed across the country to which people signed on to. One of the things that we as jurisdictions have noted across the country is the funding does not meet the need of jurisdictions across Canada and, really, in order to make sure that we are sustainable with our early learning and child care, we either need to

become more flexible or we need to fund it more. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, when the Minister says make funding more flexible, what is she considering. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, this is a federal program, and the agreement and parameters of that agreement are defined by the federal government. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I recognize that. Thank you to the Minister. But if she had her druthers, Mr. Chair, what is she advocating for specifically in the northern context? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I had the opportunity to just recently be at a federal-territorial-provincial table with my counterparts, and it was very clear that a lot of the flexibilities that they are looking for don't really apply to the territorial jurisdictions. Our jurisdictions are a little bit different, and one of the challenges that we end up having is that when programs are population-based without a substantial foundation or base funding underneath that, they don't necessarily speak very well to the realities of the territories which have a higher cost of living, higher cost of doing business. And so we have specifically asked for flexibility in dealing with northern territories and also recognizing a need for equitable funding. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Chair. And if the equitable funding that the Minister seeks is not in place for -- not this coming year, but years to come beyond 2026-2027, what kind of shortfall are we looking at as a territory? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, based on the enrolment numbers that we have today,

because as you know, this program fluctuates with the number of children that are involved in it, but as it sits today we would be looking at a shortfall of approximately \$10 million a year.

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

MS. REID: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Chair. No, I appreciate the Minister being forthright about that. And what I would say is I think there is a lot of support in this House to make sure that this particular function is adequately funded no matter which way you slice it. And that's more of a comment than a question. I will stop there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So following up on my colleague's line of questioning, but just to step back for a minute, I mean in our contributions for early learning, there's notable reductions in a number of different categories for the funding that we're giving to centre-based programs, family day homes, early childhood program contributions. And my understanding is that this is the result of a sunset of federal funding. And so for this coming year, are we expecting to have a renewed agreement with the feds to tide us through and make up the differences that we see here in our contributions to early learning centres and family day homes, or are we expecting to go into this coming year with these significant reductions going out to operators? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I want to be very clear with this response. There's no reductions to dollars being afforded to our child care providers. What you're seeing here is that when the agreement was first implemented, there wasn't, you know, a huge rush and an uptake of it, and so we ended up with a carryover. It also took time for us to get to the 300 spaces that -- additional 300 spaces of our targets that we were budgeted for, and so we ended up with carryovers year over year. And so what you're seeing there in the difference is a difference in one year has carryover; the next year does not. Those carryovers come forward in our budgeting through supplemental appropriations. And so I can confirm for the Member that we are in a new agreement with the federal government that takes us through to 2031, and that agreement is on par with our previous agreement. So there's not a reduction

to the agreement. It just -- we don't show the supplemental appropriation which carries over the previous year's funding. And as the child care -- as our needs within the sector become more and more -- so the Member just heard me let the Member for Great Slave know that our deficit would be to the tune of \$10 million. As we eat up those carryovers, that's when we're going to see the -- kind of the true-up nature of the extent of that deficit in funding. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Okay. Thanks to the Minister for that clarification. I think that's important for everybody to understand.

Can the Minister tell us when this ELCC agreement was recently renewed with the feds, was there an attempt to expand it for more than 300 spaces? As we've now sort of had unexpectedly more success than we thought in setting up new child care spaces, was that taken into account in the renegotiation with the federal government. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the new agreement was signed in February of 2025, right up against kind of at the 11th hour of the election for the federal government, and it was essentially a take-it-or-leave-it proposal without the ability to negotiate. We were able to ensure that we ended up as a territory with, I guess receipts if you will, so a letter in writing from the previous Minister about how our situation in the territories is different than other provincial jurisdictions across Canada and that the agreement does not meet our needs in the Northwest Territories. And that is some of the information that we're carrying forward with our territorial counterparts in order to ensure that we're negotiating an equity funding arrangement for territories. So that is work that is currently underway with our territorial counterparts. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Would the Minister be able to get back to us in writing with a breakdown of the 355 net new child care spaces in the territory that we've managed to create over the last few years, to get a breakdown by region or by community so we get a better understanding of where these new spaces have popped up. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, finally, quick clarification.

So under grants, the SCIP or supporting child inclusion and participation grant, has gone down from 82 to 47. Is that also going to be supplemented by -- you know, supplementary funds? Is that expected to go back up to the same levels, or are we expecting to see significant drop in the SCIP funding? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, this is an accounting one where we've moved it from the grants line item for this coming year down to the contributions line item. So it is now found just down at the bottom of that page on page 39. So it's the last line item before the totals.

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

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. I am not sure why it's listed twice on the page, but thanks to the Minister. That's all my questions for now. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Okay. Thank you. Is there any further questions? Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, I do have some on this page. So just noting that for ELCCs, the wage grid is still lower than many centres currently pay their staff. Can the Minister speak to how that problem is being addressed. Thanks.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the wage grid is, at the end of the day, the minimum, and it's what child care centres are funded for. But what they choose to pay their staff, ultimately they decide at the end of the day. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so can the Minister help us understand with the centres only able to charge based on the funding agreements of the \$10 a day, I mean how are they supposed to make up the difference? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the goal there between the wage grid for the centre-based early learning and childcare coordinators, our goal was to bring it on par with education assistants in the education system. And so that is the work that has been done. And if centres are choosing to pay higher, then that is something that they would need to mitigate from their end.

In addition, Mr. Chair, centres also get flexible funding that they can use to support wages should they choose, or to support the hiring of additional staff. So some centres, for example, have chosen to hire more people into roles like a cook, for example. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so just continuing on this thread, you know, something that I heard from child care operators recently -- well, within the past year anyways -- is that they were restricted in their ability to fundraise to provide services outside of kind of the basic agreement that we have with the feds and pass on to them. So are there any updates on that; is that something that we found some flexibility for them in? Yeah, thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, that is called voluntary funding, and there is an entire web page on the ECE website that is dedicated to it and explaining to child care providers how to use voluntary funding. It is within the federal agreement that people can use voluntary funding but the crux of that is that it needs to be voluntary. At this point, there aren't additional mandatory fees. And that's one of the flexibilities, for example, that was discussed at our recent federal-territorial-provincial meeting. With voluntary funding, the important part of that is if a family comes forward and says, no, we're not comfortable paying, you know, that added fee for this activity or transportation or this special meal, that their child can't be excluded from activities within the daycare centres. So it has to remain a voluntary fee. And

some daycare centres also participate in fundraising activities in order to mitigate some of those costs and kind of get around the whole voluntary fee portion of that. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I know that the Minister works with her various provincial ministerial counterparts on advocacy to get better flexibility from the feds on this program. The voluntary fees is certainly -- I think it's positive, but it does put some families, I think, in a bit of a difficult position, and daycares as well. So I am just wondering has the Minister made any progress with her counterparts on advocating for some more flexibility in this program to allow the daycares, I think around the country but certainly in the NWT, to operate -- how do I put it -- in maybe a bit more of a realistic way with the operating environment that they're in. The fact that they have to pay higher wages than we're able to subsidize for, that they -- yeah, that there are families demanding services that aren't -- that aren't able to be funded without additional fees. And, yeah, can the Minister give us any insights into any flexibility that she's been able to find?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the meeting that I was just at, oh my goodness, two weeks ago now in Ottawa was to discuss exactly that, different ideas and solutions from around the table, for what some of those flexibilities might be and how those flexibilities might look different between provinces from one end of the country to the other and territories from one coast to the next. And so those conversations continue. And I don't have anything new to report back to the House at this time.

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

MR. MORSE: Okay, thank you. Yeah, I appreciate that work by the Minister and certainly hope that she's able to make some progress at some point because I think that flexibility is something that families are looking for. But, I mean, at least we have the volunteer funding that can be used. I mean, the last time I spoke to child care providers about this, that was what they were looking for, was something along those lines. So at least we have that but would like to see some more progress, indeed. Yeah, just emphasizing, and if I can, get it on the record, that the main message that families brought to me is that access to child care was

their first priority. Cost of child care was priority number 2. So families need access as a number one, and certainly people are happy to see the costs reduced but not if it comes at the cost of access, so.

Can the Minister provide an update to committee on how the rollout of the GNWT early learning framework is going; has the Minister been receiving feedback from educators? Yeah, thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, huge thank you to BC on that. They were able to support us when we were looking for something that we could take off the shelf and adapt to our NWT context. So we were able to implement that. And at this point, I have nothing new to report as we continue to implement that across the territory. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, yeah, I know one or maybe more Members already touched on the success that we've had with establishing 355 net new spaces. I have two questions about that.

The first one is what are we -- do we have funding to make up that gap between the 300 and the 355? Are we able to fund that adequately? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. No, that's where some of our deficit comes from is the fact that we are funded for our target, which was 300, and we have surpassed our target. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Probably not something I'd hear from families on, but I certainly haven't heard complaints that we have too many spaces available. So I guess what I would ask is how are we managing this -- I don't want to call it a problem. I think it's a success. But of course it's a success that's come with a cost. So how are we managing that, and how do we mitigate the success of this program? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, certainly, you know, it's one of those successes where you were excited for about five seconds and then realized what it actually meant. And just to the Member's point, even though we are seeing success we're not stopping there. We know that child care is very much needed across the territory, and we want to ensure that those spaces are accessible. So we've not slowed down. We've not kind of taken our foot off the gas. We're still pursuing those child care spots because the benefit to the territory far exceeds that. So we're seeing, you know, those successes clear across the territory. And I should say not just in Yellowknife. The successes is also being seen outside of Yellowknife in small communities, which is incredibly important. How we're mitigating it right now, I end up bringing forward asks to my colleagues on the financial management board in order for us to support it, at the same time advocating to the federal government with my territorial and provincial colleagues. One of the things that I have to say is I am very thankful to the team that we have at our early learning and child care table with provinces and territories. We've agreed to stick together on this one because we see the great value of this program at the end of the day and the need for attainable, accessible, and good quality child care at the end of the day across this country. And I also have to say a big thank-you because that support and sticking together also means that they are sticking together with their territorial counterparts and recognizing that we are different and elevating our voices at the table. So it's two-pronged.

In the meantime I am going to financial management board and saying, hey, I am exceeding my budget here. I need your support on this. And on the other side, I am still looking for flexibilities and increases to budget line items from the federal government. Because at the end of the day, this was a program that was very important to the Liberal government to implement. I am not saying it's not a good program; I am saying it's a great program. But if we're going to have programs like this, we need to make sure that they're properly funded across the country. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay. According to your -- I mean, it's relevant but to your business plan, labour market programs, providing pathway to employment for NWT residents. So I just wanted to ask the Minister, we have the Aurora College, it's on here, but it doesn't outline. So I just wanted to ask the

Minister if the early learning and child care program will be offered -- I see the scholarships, but will the program be offered within the next fiscal year? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you so much. So it is -- the early learning program is currently offered at post-secondary institutions in the Northwest Territories. And in addition to it being offered in the territory, we do also provide the scholarship funding as well. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I will go to the Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: So it's being offered by the Aurora College. And so because it is a pilot project, that's why I am asking if it's going to be offered within the next -- in the fall time, will they be accepting new applications?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Yes, Mr. Chair, there was a time in the end of the last calendar year where -- for the applications that were coming forward in January, that Aurora College needed to just put a pause on it in order to get some computer stuff fixed up, but there was never an intent to not offer the programming at all. So both Aurora College offers the programming in English and Collège Nordique offers it in French. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I will go to the Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Providing pathway to employment for NWT residents, I just wanted to ask the Minister because I know I mentioned Dechinta University because they've been around longer than some of the -- I mean, Aurora College have been here longer but longer than the polytechnic, the new one, and then -- I don't want to miss the opportunity here. You know, the Indigenous language interpreters and the ALCIP program that you mentioned, the aboriginal language instructor program, those are useful programs. Because I know that many of the students that graduated from that program over five years ago, they're teaching in our school, teaching the -- they are teaching in cultural schools. So it's working really well. And I would like to see more of those, you know, like the Indigenous language -- the ALCIP and interpreter/translator program, early learning and child care, personal support worker

program. But some of the young people do not want to leave their communities. So I just wanted to ask -- and I know that my leaders have been asking before, they would like to see some kind of First Nation vocational college in our communities, in one of the Tlicho communities. So I just wanted to ask the Minister, it doesn't say here in the business plan. But, you know, like, providing pathway to employment for NWT residents, I think this is a good opportunity to approach the Indigenous, how can we keep -- you know, like, get more of our people educated and to be employed and to be in our community. So I just wanted to ask the Minister if they ever approach or work with or mention in their bilateral meeting or with their meeting with the grand chief, the Tlicho chief, on creating a training centre to provide post-secondary program. We do have other programs. We have drivers learning training. And then, you know, a company from Yellowknife, they come in to provide that program. But we haven't had any college program being offered in my community for quite some time. So I just wanted to ask, I would like to see -- and I know this is what they've been saying for a long time, over ten years, and I heard it from many people in my region that they would like to see some kind of a training facility, you know. Like, the ideal one would be if we get a new school -- when we get a new school, Chief Jimmy Bruneau School will be the ideal and/or -- and other facilities within the communities, it was mentioned. So I just wanted to ask the Minister if the Minister -- to promote this employment for NWT residents part of your -- the labour market program, have they -- was there any -- in their dialogue, did they ever -- you know, if this was mentioned about the training program or training facility. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, you know, ensuring that we're thinking, you know, not just about JK to 12 but other potential opportunities, especially when it comes to multi uses of facilities as the Member is talking about. Behchoko new school, I think is a great opportunity. You know, gone are the days where we use, you know, a piece of infrastructure for one thing. I think we always have to be thinking about how we can expand, creative uses of dollars, and get more bang for our buck across the territory.

That said, right now in -- in the Northwest Territories, we are rolling out employability training with the Literacy Council, which is a kind of access like that, that first step where people are getting employability training where

it's for the -- two-thirds of the course time are in a classroom setting and then one-third of the course time is actually on-the-job training. And so it's that kind of first foot in the door, first step in the door. And traditionally when these courses have been offered, I believe it was about 65 percent of participants were successful in gaining full-time employment after the course was delivered. So that's as a first step.

Second, there's the engagement that is happening across the Northwest Territories on adult learning opportunities and what communities and -- and especially small communities want to see as some of these opportunities. And so what the Member is talking about will also be captured in that work there.

And then third worth mentioning is that through the Post-Secondary Education Act, accreditation of new facilities was made possible through -- through that piece of legislation, and we've seen the accreditation of a new institution, and I believe 11 new courses have been accredited over the course of the last year because of that legislation. So that's work that we will continue to do. And when approached, we do our best both from a political level and also an official's level in the department to make sure that we're supporting these institutions to be successful in the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, thank you. Yeah, with the mine closing, that's where, you know -- like I've said before, when the mine close, it's going to impact my community, my regions, more because we have a lot of our young people, a lot of our people working at the mine. So now is an opportunity. It's a good opportunity. It's a good time to start engaging, you know, like, having, post-secondary, post-secondary institution in Tlicho regions. Because not everybody would want to leave, you know, the comfort of their home community where they don't want to leave their -- their family, their culture, their language. And especially when we're in housing crisis, you know, people don't want to leave. So now is the time. I think now's the time because before -- yes, because of the mine, the truck drivers, truck driving program and other programs were more popular. But now with the mine closing, some of the professionals are going to change. But we do need more trades programs. So that's why I am -- I am just asking about that, you know, about creating a training centre in Tlicho region to accommodate those

who do not want to leave their communities. It's -- yeah, I don't think -- Yellowknife is too expensive. Well, the small community is expensive already as it is but it's going to be more expensive, especially if you're going to be renting private -- you know, for two bedroom apartment unit private, it's \$2,700. It's increasing on April 1st. So there's no way they can afford that if they have other bills. And SFA is not enough, you know, for single students and the -- for a family with one child, it's not enough. Especially with four kids, that's not enough too, so. And I know that Yellowknife does not have a lot of student housing. So I think -- I don't want to -- I just -- I would like to see the Minister engaging with -- or, you know, talking to the Indigenous government about possibly creating a training centre in the small communities in the regions. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, I absolutely hear the Member, and I spend a lot of time talking to Tlicho Investment Corporation specifically about workforce development opportunities. And one of the things that they're looking very closely at is actually using their workforce to do on-the-job training so that people are not expected to quit their jobs, go to school, but how can they incorporate a lot of these trainings and certifications right into the employment that they're doing today. So they still -- they maintain their job but as they're doing their job, they either get time to work on their certification if it's more, you know, book-based at that time, or they're able to be -- be doing the needs of their certification through their day-to-day job. And so making sure that we're supporting this mechanism as kind of a creative out-of-the-classroom, out of a bricks-and-mortar facility, where people still get the training that they need, still end up with the certification, because that's so important that people end up with that accreditation at the end of the day, that's one of the things that we're working at pursuing directly with Tlicho Investment Corporation, recognizing the magnitude of NWT residents that they employ that are also working at the mines. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay. Before I move on, is there any further questions? Okay, thank you. No further questions, please turn to page 38.

Education, culture and employment, early learning, \$31,270,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to Education, beginning on page 42 with information items on page 44 to 46. Are there any questions?

We'll go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to highlight that in the emergency management section of ECE's business plan they note that they completed three scheduled reviews of safe school plans, and I am just curious if the Minister can outline how the department will support education bodies to further strengthen emergency response and lockdown procedures and increase active participation in community-level emergency planning. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): I will go to the Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we review the safe schools plans on a three-year revolving basis, and if -- with our education bodies. And if there are any adjustments that need to be made within that time frame, we certainly support education bodies to achieve those. So that is something that is happening on the regular. Education bodies also practice their protocols multiple times a year. And, certainly, as I said, ECE is always there to support education bodies on what they need in either application or practice or process on the back end. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And further to the Minister's comments, then, how does ECE ensure that mental health supports are integrated into these exercises that are happening regularly so that you -- students, especially young students, understand what is happening and feel supported before and after these drills? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, one of the things that we communicate to education bodies when they're doing some of these drills is to ensure that notice is given at home that this might be happening, especially in light of recent events in British Columbia, ensuring that families are aware that these drills are happening, why they happen, why they're important. I did have a conversation over the weekend with the education Minister from British Columbia, and she did stress that making sure that we all are practicing our safe protocols and we all know

what is the process that we're expected to take literally saves lives and is critically important. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the Minister's compassion and proactive stance on this one.

Switching gears a little bit, and to follow up on some of what was discussed in QP, it appears that there is a \$546,000 allocation to support Aurora College in the delivery of practical nurse education. And so can the Minister elaborate on how this funding will support this program and what ways she sees it enhancing the northern workforce. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, this funding line item used to be found over in health and social services' main estimates, and because it is a direct link to delivering education and delivering post-secondary education through the health sustainability unit, it was identified as something that should be funded over here in education's budget. And so we have moved that line item. But it's not an enhancement. It is simply movement of a line item that was previously found in health and social services. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wish it was an enhancement but oh well.

I will let other Members speak to some maybe high -- high interest issues. But I do have one final question in my time allotment, which is there is a \$2.4 million adjustment to the school funding framework contribution requirements such that incremental funding will temporarily replace Jordan's Principle funding. What does this adjustment include? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you so much. So the school funding formula enhancements in here relate to materials and supplies. So there's forced growth under there. It's also assistive technologies for inclusive schooling. In addition to that, there is maintenance funding for YK1 and YCS schools here in Yellowknife as well, Mr. Chair. And

there's also collective agreement funding through the NWT TTA. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And is that -- I think that adjustment might have been for the 2025-2026 year; I apologize if I have the numbers incorrect. But without federal realignment to the realities of the NWT with Jordan's Principle, what kind of shortfalls are we looking at for inclusive schooling, Mr. Chair? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, in the previous school year, there was \$58.6 million that flowed from the federal government to education bodies, but that would not be reflected in our budgets because those agreements and arrangements and contributions were directly from the federal government to education bodies, not to the Government of the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you. So our contribution is fully just the piece that she spoke to earlier, be it supplies, that sort of thing. Thank you. I am getting a nod, so I will stop there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I do have a number of questions on this. We'll see how many I can get through.

One, I wanted to turn first to business plans, looking at a success story -- now I've lost it. So the SNAP program, the targets -- there we go.

Okay. On page 14 of the business plan, it looks like we've managed to increase the number of students over the past three school years participating in the SNAP program from 21 to 36 and the latest is 57. But we also have a goal around increasing the number of regions where there are actually SNAP students participating. And so while we've been increasing the number, it looks like they've all been concentrated in the North Slave and South Slave. I wonder if the Minister can comment on why she thinks we've been able to see success in increasing the number of SNAP students in some regions, and then what work is underway to try to allow more students to participate in the other regions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, well, thank you to the Member for highlighting that success. It's a number that definitely makes me excited. We started with about half of that when we started this Assembly, and we were, I believe, in -- had SNAP students in two regions. Now we've got twice as many SNAP students, and they're found in six areas or six communities in the Northwest Territories. And certainly the goal is to see SNAP students in every community in the Northwest Territories.

Snap is heavily reliant on relationships. And so in order for us to have SNAP students, you need a student who wants to do it and then you need somebody who's willing to take on a SNAP student who's either a Red Seal or a journey person, an employer, in a community. And so, fundamentally, to the program is -- or fundamental to the program is establishing those relationships and making sure that those relationships are continued to being maintained between the education body, the student, the employer, the department. And so it really is based on relationships. And so that's why you hear me in the House saying if anybody knows of an employer in any community in the territory that wants to participate, please let me know because I definitely want to be able to take that name back to the department and follow up and make sure that we are working together to create those relationships. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wanted to touch upon education authority contributions. So there is an increase there, a modest increase, although -- so I am looking on page 44 of the budget -- from last year's main estimates, \$179 million and a bit, but then in the revised estimates it went up to almost \$196 million, and now we're back somewhere in the middle to \$186.5 million.

So can the Minister explain what accounts for both the additions over last year's main estimates but also why the revised estimates required significant, you know, boost in funding over what we approved last year. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the federal government rolled back their Jordan's Principle funding, and so what you see in the revised is our \$14 million

for our support assistants initiative. And other than that, our funding is based predominantly -- it's school funding formula that is largely based on number of students enrolled. And I think we would need an entire kind of crash course in student funding formula if we were to explain it, and nobody would want me being the one delivering that. But essentially the difference is the Jordan's Principle -- sorry, the support assistant initiative funding in the middle there and then when you see the increase, we've got some forced growth increases to the school funding formula as well that I outlined and would be happy to repeat that is in this budget here. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So in terms of the additional funding that was approved in supplementary budgets or supplementary appropriations for -- to make up for loss in Jordan's Principle funding, does ECE currently even have an estimate of what would be required for this coming year if we were to try to fill the gap for, say, one more year for the loss of Jordan's Principle funding? My understanding was that for the past year, some school boards sort of were losing funding, others were able to sort of be tied over through multi-year agreements so that might be coming to an end here so we might have an even greater need in the upcoming year in terms of trying to fill gaps left by Jordan's Principle. Has ECE even attempted to come up with an estimate of what would be required if the burden did fall on the GNWT to fill those gaps? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the conversations around Jordan's Principle over the course of the last year have not stopped at all. Right now, those conversations are happening with education bodies because, as I said, the funding went directly to education bodies. So making sure that we have the numbers and kind of the more granular details of how the funding was used is very important. So, for example, in some instances it was used for a support assistants. In other instances, in other education bodies, it was actually used for a teaching position. And so there's finer detailed nuances, including, you know, in some cases, it was Jordan's Principle; in other cases it was Inuit Child First funding. And so there's not really one kind of clear path but, you know, really, ultimately, at the end of the day what I can say is that Jordan's Principle has grown in

this territory, the use of it, year over year. Every year that I have been employed as an MLA, the funding of Jordan's Principle to this territory has doubled. I believe when I started, it was about \$14 million. The next year, it was 28 and then all of a sudden it was 56. So it has continued to escalate and go up. And so I would venture to say that if, you know, based on last year's numbers that we could potentially end up with asks that are greater than where we were last year if we look at the trajectory of Jordan's Principle funding. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. Can the Minister explain whether any of the contributions in these line items to education authorities have been for changing drinking water fixtures due to high lead levels, or where is that money coming from to support schools as they try to find both, like, replacement water sources but then ultimately to fix the fixtures to reduce the lead levels. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, none of the funding required in order to mitigate lead in drinking water is found within this budget. That would come forward in the form of a supplementary appropriation. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. And I wanted to turn to the school-based mental health and wellness programs. I know it's one of the goals in the business plan. So now I am looking at page 20 of the business plan. And I know we're measuring the number of students that are accessing these mental health and wellness services in the schools. Are there any new initiatives to try to enhance these mental health and wellness programs in schools for this coming year? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, yes -- the short answer is yes. So there is an increase in this budget for school-based mental health and wellness funding initiatives. And I have to give credit where credit is due. It was at one of our education leader forum meetings that a principal from a small community ended up sitting at the table. And I consistently always

check in with all of our education partners on this program every time we get together. And the small community principal put up their hand and said this is one way that the policy and reality are not working out very well for this program, and we were able to take that information away, successfully go forward to FMB with a proposal, and you now see that in this budget which equates to an additional \$1.67 million for school-based mental health and wellness funding. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Is there any further questions? Okay, before I go to the Member from Frame Lake, I am going to ask to take a five-minute or ten-minute break, and then I will come back to the Member from Frame Lake.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay. Yeah, before we continue on here, before I go to Frame Lake, I just want to just remind Members that when we speak just be careful because the mic is very sensitive, so any paper, pens, or anything like that, translators, it's hard on the ears. So, anyway, I am just going to continue on. I am going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. And I will try to keep my shuffling and scuttling to a minimum. I wanted to ask some business plan related questions that I think are related to this section. Just note that the mandate outlines identification of surplus lands and potentially turning those over for increasing our access to housing item in -- sorry, Mr. Chair -- priority for the Assembly. Can the Minister share additional information on how that identification process is going and how or who they'd be transferred to in order to support housing. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we're finishing up this work to the end of this fiscal year. First, we are considering the needs of different education bodies and the needs of their education needs in each of their communities, and then from there, we're evaluating whether or not it would be suitable housing for the purpose -- sorry, suitable land for the purpose of housing. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Okay, thank you. So -- sorry, did the Minister give a timeline in her answer there,

just when we can expect that they'll complete that process?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you. So that work will be completed by the end of this fiscal year.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And just continuing on the housing thread, what have been the outcomes of ECE's work with Housing NWT, Aurora College, and the NWTTA on housing needs, including educator and student housing assessments? Can the Minister give us any updates on that?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we continue to share information both between the NWTTA education bodies with Housing NWT, with Indigenous governments as well, to make sure that we're sharing information so that the needs are known. We've been able to work successfully with Housing NWT on when needed acquiring teacher housing or changing policies to make sure that we are doing our part to retain teachers. And we've also had the -- we've also seen in our capital budgets, dollars come forward in order to do improvements on teacher housing that is still within ECE stock as well. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. What actions has ECE taken this year to support Aurora College in identifying partners in advancing student housing development, including work related to the expression of interest process? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, my work and the department's work with this has largely been to support the college when it identifies priorities and when it identifies that it needs support, so whether that's knowing, you know, what federal minister to talk to, different federal programs that are available, and then also knowing, you know, different entities within town that might be interested in doing -- forming partnerships for this purpose. And so at this

point, the relationship and conversations have been based in support, not based in ECE doing anything on part of Aurora College because they simply are not at that point. But certainly when people have come to me, I have passed that message along and I've also essentially participated any way, shape, or form that I can.

And in addition to that, other post-secondary institutions have also inquired about potential options for housing and potential partners, and so I've been able to provide contact information to connect people so that like-minded and organizations with similar goals are able to work together. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I note that Aurora College's funding has reduced by a small amount this year. Can the Minister help us understand what that cut is about?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Sorry, I am just going to go to the next -- can I get -- so I see that there is a difference of about 7 -- \$600,000. Oh, and that's in relation to the closure of the community learning centres, Mr. Chair, and our memorandum of understanding that we had for the delivery of adult learning and basic education. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. So that money was taken from the college, which seems fair if they're not delivering that anymore, but where did the funding go to?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much. So we would have had a grant that we would have contributed to the literacy council in that form, and it's not going to be a perfect split because you're also going to have forced growth increases from Aurora College for their leases as well that are involved in this. So just so the Member knows, you're not looking for, you know, a straight line item to line item difference here because there's also increases to Aurora College included in that for the forced growth of their rental units for Stanton Suites as well as Northern United Place. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The other post-secondary contributions line item, I note that is for funding for College Nordique and Dechinta. I am just trying to understand -- I mean, has the Minister considered any increases to this line item per the discussion we were having earlier about the important role that Dechinta could play? I note the amount of funding that they're operating with between the two organizations is very small compared to Aurora College as my colleague previously pointed out. So I am wondering about this item. Thanks.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, there is additional funding for other post-secondary institutions that is found within this budget. It's just not found within this line item because it comes from different funding agreements that I believe is found under the labour section. But I would need to confirm that. But I can confirm for the Member that there is, within this budget, additional dollars as well for other post-secondary contributions.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, has the Aurora College given any indication to the Minister that they are adequately funded to complete the transition to a polytechnic? I think -- I can't emphasize enough the importance of making sure that we are taking every -- how do I put this off the top of my head here. That with the different indicators that have been coming about what's happening with our economy over the next few years, we certainly don't want to be reducing our diversification opportunities. So I am just wondering if the Minister has been working with Aurora College on the transition, considering it's one of the many items that could potentially build job creation in the NWT considering the news that's been coming about our economy. I am not putting that in a real Member's statement form here right now, but -- it's late in the day, but I do want to just emphasize the importance of it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I will go to the Minister, if you want to respond.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, certainly we continue to work with Aurora College. Any, you know, funding requests that Aurora College brings forward to me that is ready to go to the financial management board, I bring those forward to the

financial management board. Certainly, the operational decisions of Aurora College fall under the authority of the board of governors. But certainly having conversations with the chair around different opportunities that present themselves in front of us and, you know, how we can make sure that we are aligning ourselves to be prepared for those is certainly a conversation we have frequently. And I also meet not only with the chair but also quarterly with the entire board itself so that we can have discussions around the priorities of the Aurora College mandate agreement as well to make sure that we're all on the same page. And I think it's helpful when there's so many -- it's in constant evolution at the moment. And so it's really important that we stay well connected. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay. I will go back to Frame Lake, if you have one more question.

Thank you. I will go to the Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is on the Healthy Food for Learning. Considering the inflation costs and food costs, is there a demand to increase this budget allowance of 650? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the Healthy Food for Learning has consistently been \$650,000 a year. And if the Member looks down a little bit, there's also the national school food program, which is in 2025-2026 was to the tune of \$4.25 million. And then in 2026-2027 is \$2.553 million. That is through the federal government's school food program. Thank you.

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

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In that particular line item there, national school food program, last year was much higher than this year. What's the reason for the shortfall or the decrease in the budget line item? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So because in the previous year, in the 2025-2026, that's two years rolled into one from the federal government so we were able to do a carryforward. And so the funding for 2026-2027 represents one year worth of funding and the previous year had two. Thank you.

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

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And my next question is the northern distance learning here budgeted at 13.73. The way I read the backup information, it sounds like the Beaufort Delta Divisional Education Council is delivering this program to those communities. What allowances are there for the Sahtu communities? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the Beaufort Delta Education Council delivers the northern distance learning on behalf of the whole territory. So that's where the program itself is based but it's accessible throughout the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I will go back to the Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Nothing further. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Next on my list, I've got the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to quickly follow up; we didn't have enough time in the last series of questions.

On the mental health and wellness programs in schools, the Minister mentioned the good news that \$1.675 million has been added to support these programs, but can she explain what difference that will make or how students in schools will be able to see a difference with that funding. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the issue that was raised to us at the ed leaders forum in regards to this program, and the way that ECE funds it, was that because it was based on the number of students in the school that the program was supporting, if a school was smaller and had a smaller number of students that the funding that they were receiving through ECE did not necessarily account for one full-time staff member. And as you can imagine, working in a small community, it made it more difficult for them to attract and retain a staff member that would be specialized for this type of a role, and if they were on a road-based system and they were shared between another

community, in order to make up one full-time position it might be unrealistic for the system to expect a teacher or a professional working within that field to travel up and down the road for a part-time role. And so what that did was ensure that every school had access to funding for one full-time person minimum. So it meant that we increased the funding levels to ensure that we were looking at a minimum of one FTE per school. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so that is good news, and thanks for explaining.

When it comes to larger centres like Yellowknife, is there evidence that -- I mean, there's numbers in the business plan that 400-and-something students have -- each month are getting access to these programs. But do we have evidence that there is additional demand that we're not able to meet or, you know, whether or not we have the right number of providers to meet the needs of students? Are we collecting that kind of data, and what does it look like so far? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment works closely with ed leaders from across the territory to make sure that we are in touch, essentially, and understanding how this program is being met within communities and making sure that we're collecting data from schools on a regular basis. Anecdotally, I hear from parents, especially -- well, in Yellowknife here, that they want to see more access to clinicians. But I also know that part of this program is an effort to make sure that we're being preventative and that we're able to address bigger trends that might be, you know, not in kind of the tier 3, tier 4 need level but more people who can access, you know, small group setting type supports, where the school can address trends that are happening, so making sure that we're also at the same time doing some preventative and education with people about not every instant needs a psychiatrist or a psychologist, that there are ways that we can address this as a community, as a school together, and making sure that the school is able to be empowered and responsive in addition to that kind of baseline data that ECE is collecting in order to use going forward.

I also make sure that we have check-ins, as I've mentioned here earlier today, with ed leaders

every time we get together at our biannual forum. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: That's all my questions for this one. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I just want to talk about other post-secondary contributions. So Dechinta, from my understanding, receives on average \$2.6 million from the federal government calculated over a five-year period. College Nordique, \$1.5 million. Our contribution to the former is around \$500,000 and, again, taking the same five-year average, and \$350,000 for College Nordique compared to Aurora College which is \$33.5 million, plus federal funding on top of that. So it seems like these other post-secondary institutions, which we're trying to grow to build a northern knowledge economy and plus offer very innovative coursework, in Dechinta's case very innovative towards Indigenous education as well, which, of course, bears its own challenges, and they've been profoundly successful. Their graduation rates are to be envied by any post-secondary institution. So if we're trying to grow these sectors and we're trying to empower these private institutions who are achieving great success, why are we letting the federal government do so much of the heavy lifting? Are we not putting all our eggs in the Aurora College basket? Because it seems like now is the time to diversify our post-secondary education dollars into other institutions so we can grow the knowledge economy together rather than just relying on one public institution. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So absolutely, the investment in Aurora College, as the Member says, all our eggs in one basket, was something that, you know, has grown over decades. And so now we're in a position where we're wanting to change the way that Aurora College operates in the Northwest Territories and change the expectation of this government on the way that it operates, and so that's the transition we find ourselves in right now. So part of that transition is both making sure that they've got the legislation that they need in order to continue to create that distance between us so that they continue on their journey to being more and more arm's length, and part of that process will also be a school funding formula that will need

to be drafted by the Government of the Northwest Territories in that, you know, we need to recognize that everyone within the post-secondary landscape has a role to play and, as the Member said, need to celebrate the diversity in that. And so that will be what will come out of that school funding formula, is a clear indication of how, going forward, we fund Aurora College, but then also how we fund other post-secondary institutions in the Northwest Territories. So that's a continuation of the evolution we find ourselves in. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the formula funding, that's going to be for all post-secondary institutions, not just for Aurora College? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So there needs to be kind of two parts to this. So one, how Aurora College is going to be funded in the Northwest Territories, what our expectation is as an Assembly and a government going forward. And then two, how we intend to include other post-secondary in that, as the Member indicates, to create a bit more of an even playing field and do we intend to -- I guess, how many eggs do we intend to keep in that basket. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. Is this approach of using formula funding present in other provinces and territories and how they fund public and private post-secondary institutions? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes.

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

MR. TESTART: Okay. Well, maybe -- perhaps I will inquire as to which ones those are. But it just seems to me like you might run into issues there because we do -- I think there is a need to fund Aurora College as a public institution, like -- or a public university, University Polytechnic once it gets there. That makes sense to have kind of a core funding grant. But we do need to provide stabilization elsewhere. But I would rather see post-secondary

institutions receive funding based on meeting the needs of the public policy priorities of the government. So essentially the government says well, we need someone to deliver post-secondary education for engineers or whatever the labour market needs are, then we make the money available, and then anyone who can meet those needs receives the money rather than just a formula. So is that a consideration that we're going to fund these institutions based on what they produce and that it aligns with the needs of public priorities as set by an Assembly's mandate rather than just kind of static funding based on streams -- right? Like, I don't know what they would look like, but student support or whatever, like academic programs. I can imagine a few. But rather than imagining, like, can we fund these institutions based on the results they produce rather just on what their operational needs are? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. That will certainly be part of the research component to figure out the future funding mechanism of Aurora College. For example, you know, the Member brings up success metrics as part of that funding, and certainly that's part of the research that will go into creating this funding formula. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. Okay. Also the -- so the federal funding that's out there for Collège Nordique and Dechinta, which are the two named institutions in the other post-secondary contributions, has changed significantly, and they're seeing at least -- and some of the French language post-secondary funding that was supposed to be a permanent thing is now being clawed back. So that's a huge funding gap. I don't think that \$353,000 to share between the two institutions is going to be sufficient. How are we going to meet the needs of both of these institutions to ensure they continue to succeed at educating Northerners? Because, again, they're at the mercy of federal programming that's now sunsetting, and we need to ensure that they have adequate resourcing so they don't fall behind on, again, those very successful graduate numbers that both institutions continue to post versus where all our eggs are, to go back to that analogy, which is not producing results equivalent to their funding. It is an astronomical amount of money per student -- or per graduate that Aurora College is receiving versus the very modest sums that

we provide to other post-secondary institutions. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we fund -- sorry, we fund Dechinta \$500,000 a year. We fund Collège Nordique \$200,000 per year. And then they also, as the Member noted, receive federal funding on top of that. We're in, like I say, an evolution of our post-secondary landscape right now where we -- and believe me, Aurora College listens to the House and knows that they are at a time where Members more than ever, on both sides of the House, are expecting results for the investments that they're putting into Aurora College, and they are working hard to use that funding to see the evolution of Aurora College into a polytechnic university. As I indicated earlier today, they met a pretty major milestone in December where they had the CAQC travel to their campuses to tour the campuses, and they are in the process of working through the recommendations that have come out of that for their accreditation process.

In addition, Mr. Chair, we also have the NWT Post-Secondary Accountability Framework which monitors performance of institutions, collects data. So we're already in the process of tracking the success of institutions in the territory, and this is another tool that can be used in some of this work going forward as well. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And my colleagues and I have been trying to find the \$500,000 and \$200,000. I did know these sums exist. Again, they are publicly reported on, but there's no line item in here. And I know speaking to some of these institutions that it would be helpful for their funding purposes if there were specific lines that showed the contributions they're getting in a timely way.

Can the Minister improve on the main estimates to do that for both the purposes of public transparency but also to aid these institutions in leveraging GNWT funding with other sources of funding? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the Member is right. What is noted here in the main estimates is the \$353,000. And so normally what you would -- normally we would not have seen other

post-secondary contributions in here at all, and so that is something that I will follow up with the department. I hear the Member as far as having clarity on that, and at the same time, we want to ensure that we're being transparent but also want to ensure that we can easily evolve this as time goes on as well. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Yeah, okay, thank you. And, I mean, that would be helpful, and I think the transparency is important here because you can see Aurora College and that line, and it's always there, including the, again, 34 or \$35 million we used to fund it. So given that we are willing to spend tens of millions on Aurora College, can we at least find a million dollars for other post-secondary institutions, double what we're currently providing? My math is \$1.4 million. Can we double what we're providing? Because I believe if we double the resources available to these institutions, we will double their output. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, certainly I would need to find within education, culture and employment somewhere to pull those dollars from at a time where we need more and more dollars for education. So I can certainly go back and see where I can pull those dollars from, but I certainly welcome any suggestions from Members as well. Thank you.

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

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

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. There's a motion on the floor to report progress. The motion is in order and non-debatable. All those in favour? All those opposed? Motion carried.

---Carried

I am going to ask the Sergeant-at-Arms please escort the witnesses from the chambers. Thank you to all the translators, technical people, colleagues, and staff. Mahsi.

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 448-20(1), 2026-2027 Main Estimates, and would like to report progress. And, Mr. Speaker, I move the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Can I have a seconder? Oh, let's go to Great Slave. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carried.

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

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr Harjot Sidhu): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the rise of House, the Standing Committee on Procedures and Privileges will meet in our Eagle Room, and the board of management will meet in the Arctic Fox Room.

Orders of the day for Tuesday, February 17th, 2026, at 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer or Reflection
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
5. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
6. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
7. Returns to Oral Questions
 - Oral Question 974-20(1), Medical Travel Policy and Ministerial Exemptions
8. Acknowledgements
9. Oral Questions
10. Written Questions
11. Returns to Written Questions
 - Written Question 26-20(1), Application of Waters Act Provisions to the Sale or Transfer of Mining Assets
 - Written Question 27-20(1), Physician Recruitment and Retention
 - Written Question 28-20(1), Medical Travel

- Written Question 29-20(1), Paramedic Contracts
 - Written Question 30-20(1), Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority Action Plans
 - Written Question 31-20(1), Prenatal, Pregnancy, and Postpartum Costs
12. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
 13. Petitions
 14. Tabling of Documents
 15. Notices of Motion
 16. Motions
 - Motion 66-20(1), Extended Adjournment of the House to February 24, 2026
 17. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
 18. First Reading of Bills
 - Bill 42, Tlego'hli Got'ine Self-Government Agreement Act
 19. Second Reading of Bills
 20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Bill 33-20(1), Technical Safety Statutes Amendment Act
 - Tabled Document 448-20(1), 2026-2027 Main Estimates
 21. Report of Committee of the Whole
 22. Third Reading of Bills
 23. Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Tuesday, February 17th, 2026, at 1:30 a.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 5:50 p.m.

UNEDITED HANSARD