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The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker

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Send corrections to kate_covello@ntassembly.ca

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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UNEDITED HANSARD

YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Tuesday, February 17, 2026****Members Present**

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

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayer or Reflection

---Prayer or reflection

SPEAKER (HON. SHANE THOMPSON):

Please be seated. I'd like to thank Ms. Qitsualik for the opening prayer. Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Housing NWT.

Ministers' Statements**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 181-20(1):
HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize the Government of the Northwest Territories' progress in advancing transitional housing initiatives and improving shelter operations across the North, as guided by A Way Home: A Comprehensive Strategy to Address Homelessness in the Northwest Territories.

In recent months, with the support of our partners, we have made meaningful advancements in addressing chronic homelessness in the NWT. I want to reaffirm our dedication to working together to find northern solutions that support and protect our most vulnerable residents.

Increasing transitional and supportive housing across the North was identified in A Way Home as a top priority. Enhanced supports and person-centered services give vulnerable residents the opportunity to address past issues, develop life skills and reconnect with their communities, ultimately helping them to move toward stable, long-term housing.

The GNWT and Housing NWT have been collaborating with several partners to bring more transitional and supportive housing to the North.

In December, Housing NWT and the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs unveiled the new temporary transitional housing facility located on Highway No. 3, adjacent to the Folk on the Rocks site in Yellowknife. This new 24-unit facility provides

individuals experiencing homelessness with a supportive step when leaving the emergency shelter system. The facility is operated by the Yellowknife Women's Society, offering programming and services for residents such as case management, life skills development, and help with employment, income assistance and housing applications.

For the first time, residents have access to safe transitional housing in Yellowknife and soon they will also have access in Inuvik after returning from out-of-territory treatment services.

Housing NWT and the Department of Health and Social Services have collaborated with the Salvation Army in Yellowknife and the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation in Inuvik to develop a transitional housing model for residents returning from addiction treatment. One five-bedroom home in each community has been renovated to operate as a transitional home for post-addictions recovery programs. These homes offer a safe, substance-free, and supportive environment where residents live as a cohesive unit to focus on maintaining their recovery, rebuilding essential life skills, and working towards long-term stability within their community.

The 2026-2027 Budget contains significant proposed increases for the operations of emergency homeless shelters. This increased funding is to ensure the safe and stable operations of this vital network of emergency shelters. This will allow organizations to attract and retain staff and ensure that they are adequately funded to address inflationary costs.

It was recently announced that in spring of 2026, Housing NWT will assume operational responsibility for the Yellowknife Day Shelter and Sobering Centre, which are currently managed by Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority. With a designated operational lead in Housing NWT, services will align across all shelters, supporting the GNWT's efforts to deliver a unified and coordinated approach to homelessness across the territory.

In 2021, Housing NWT began operating the Inuvik homeless shelter. During this time, the GNWT increased shelter funding to strengthen service stability and support local capacity, which created the conditions necessary to develop community-led operations. As a result, this vital service returned to a community organization last month when the Inuvik Homeless Shelter Advisory Board assumed operational responsibility of the shelter. Housing NWT has also issued a request for proposals to identify a potential operator for the Inuvik warming shelter, continuing the GNWT's efforts to expand community involvement in homelessness services.

I am encouraged by the meaningful progress we have made in addressing chronic homelessness in the Northwest Territories. To ensure our housing solutions reflect the needs and realities of the North, we will continue to strengthen our partnerships with non-governmental organizations, Indigenous governments, community governments and individuals with lived experience. Through these shared efforts, we can build a more responsive housing system that supports the residents to find safe and stable places to call home. Quyananni, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Frame Lake.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 895-20(1): AURORA COLLEGE RECOMMENDATIONS

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eight years ago, this Assembly received the report of a foundational review of Aurora College which our current Premier pushed for when he was an MLA. The review made a bold case for change that I think is worth reiterating now in 2026 as we face significant economic challenge because I don't think we've been acting with the urgency required to address what we are facing and was communicated in that report.

I quote, There are three key and urgent reasons that support the proposition and change recommended in the foundational review. Firstly, advances in higher education are increasing at a phenomenal rate, and, consequently, the college needs to adapt to this shift. Secondly, because of this increasing pace of change, the only way to retain a lifelong working capacity is to engage as a total NWT population in lifelong integrated learning. Hence, NWT social structures need to keep pace with the accelerated rate of change. The

need for higher education has to be seen by the GNWT as a primary economic driver and key to developing a knowledge economy and as such, the need for workforce development has never been more acute. Thirdly, it is a well-researched fact that a critical mass of intellectual human capital attracts substantive investment. As a result, it's imperative that the NWT take action to immediately begin investment in a progressive 21st century higher education model. This investment will provide the necessary institutional capacity for the NWT to attract substantive national and multinational corporate attention and investment throughout the next three to four decades. It is important for the GNWT to decide and act on a new vision as early as practicable as the post-secondary sector is becoming increasingly global and competitive. The NWT is not only competing with other northern institutions but institutions from across Canada and North America.

Mr. Speaker, I highlight that last point in particular. When it was made, the proposal was for NWT to become the first circumpolar jurisdiction in Canada with a university. As I say these words today, eight years later, we are now facing the scenario of being the last with the Yukon years ahead of us and Nunavut making bold strides. Mr. Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and colleagues. Mr. Speaker, if we want to understand why our jurisdiction is falling behind our peers, it is not due to inaction in one economic sector but rather that we have rested on our laurels while our neighbours have diversified. Mr. Speaker, the time to act on that was ten years ago, but now is the moment for us to turn this narrative around. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 896-20(1): PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR SHORTFALLS

MS. MORGAN: Mr. Speaker, committee was told back in May of last year give us time, give us space. This was from the public administrator of the health authority when his work plan was unveiled six months after his appointment to what we thought might be a one-year term. With the public administrator replacing the leadership council, we were told health authority governance would become more efficient, streamlined, nimble, with more consistent oversight. And we were told if politicians would just back off with our constant queries and if frontline practitioners would stop publicly raising alarm bells, leaving the PA scrambling with media work, health authority

leadership could settle in and get to work making change.

It's now been 14 months since the PA was appointed. We have blown past nearly every deadline for concrete results that were laid out in the work plan with no deliverables in sight.

The main action in the work plan towards health care workforce stabilization was to develop and release a people strategy by June 2025. Last September, we were told it was almost ready and would be released in October. It still hasn't been released.

The PA was supposed to produce a balanced budget for the NTHSSA by last December so we could see savings in these main estimates. I see no evidence of that work, Mr. Speaker.

He was supposed to be reviewing the health authority governance and organizational structure to find efficiencies and reduce duplication between HSS and the authority. That was due by December but as of September hadn't even been initiated. Also not initiated as of September was a comprehensive business case for the small community model of care.

The PA was supposed to be held publicly accountable with a dashboard on the website charting progress on the work plan. That was supposed to be up last June. Guess what? Still no sign of it.

Well, what about the intangibles? The PA made much of his commitment to boost morale, improve workplace culture and communication, make practitioners feel heard. But the practitioners I've talked to say they've never even seen the PA step foot into their workplaces. Mr. Speaker, I am not interested in giving any more time or any more space to the PA. It's time for results. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 897-20(1):
YELLOWKNIFE CITIZENS FOR CEASEFIRE
NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION RALLY

MS. REID: Mr. Speaker, Happy Lunar New Year, Happy Mardi Gras, blessed Shrove Tuesday, and Ramadan Mubarak, Mr. Speaker. My riding is diverse, and I want to remark on all holidays my constituents celebrate where and when I can.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I wish to also note that I have many constituents who are active in the YK Citizens for Ceasefire group. Every Saturday, they brave the cold and make their

voices heard at the four-way intersection at 48th Street and 49th Avenue, in support of a free Palestine.

Today, they are rallying and raising their voices in a Canada-wide day of action to call for more stringent exports of arms and parts to the US, for transparency and consistency of permitting with all export partners. The proposed No More Loopholes Bill C-233 is before the House of Commons.

Mr. Lloyd Axworthy, former federal MP and Minister, stated in a column to the Globe and Mail that, quote, the bill does not restrict manufacturing, sales, or innovation. It merely standardizes reviews so that exports to the United States undergo the same processes as all others. Factories will continue to operate, jobs will remain secure, and responsible oversight will strengthen, rather than weaken, confidence in the sector, end quote.

Mr. Speaker, when we are experiencing the imperial boomerang in real time, that is, imperialist powers imposing repressive techniques honed abroad on the global south and then brought home and used against their own citizens, I am proud that my fellow Yellowknifers are speaking up for justice and appropriate transparency in arms trade. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 898-20(1):
MACKENZIE VALLEY HIGHWAY
REGULATIONS COLLABORATION

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, regulatory and permitting approvals are critical to advance projects. Mr. Speaker, the cornerstone of our consensus government here in the Northwest Territories is working together for all people. It's about being proactive, communicative, and solution-driven. Today, I want to speak about why that spirit of collaboration must extend to include meaningful partnership between the Government of the Northwest Territories, the federal government, and our Indigenous governments.

Mr. Speaker, the Mackenzie Valley Highway environmental assessment demonstrates both the promise and the complexity of the major infrastructure developments. The scope has been extended, in consultation with Indigenous governments, Wrigley to Inuvik. Phase 1 is already underway. Phase 2 included in this scope, progress is needed, regulatory challenges overcome, overlapping consultation

requirements across multiple Indigenous governments. Alternatively, Indigenous governments, through their modern treaties, have the option to direct negotiations with the federal government on access.

These aren't just bureaucratic hurdles, Mr. Speaker. My recent trips, I heard loudly consultation fatigue. When Indigenous governments don't have adequate capacity support, when we rush consultations instead of building it into the process from day one, delays can be frustrating.

Mr. Speaker, I am calling on this government to establish a joint Department of Infrastructure and Indigenous governments team to lead phase 2 of the Mackenzie Valley Highway environmental assessment. This team would coordinate consultation, eliminate duplication, ensure adequate capacity funding flows to Indigenous governments, and build timelines together. This is consensus government and a meaningful collaboration way. This is how we turn regulatory challenges into opportunities for genuine partnerships. Mr. Speaker, our Indigenous governments hold a key to progress and development. Mahsi.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 899-20(1):
JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE FUNDING

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again to speak to this government's continued refusal to address a growing crisis in Indigenous education. Today I want to dig deeper into Jordan's Principle funding, which our schools have become so resilient. If you look closely, you will see that this funding has not only taken on responsibility that belongs to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment but also filling in the gap left by the Minister of Health and Social Services.

When it comes to ensuring children and complex needs can fully participate in learning, there is a clear intersection between health and education. As schools' population continues to grow, an increasing number of children are arriving with disabilities, challenges that directly impact their ability to learn, including autism, speech, language, or auditory disorders, hearing loss, and mental health conditions. These needs must be identified early so the school can design a learning environment that meets their needs. Parents cannot do it alone, and many struggle to access funding from primary care or cannot afford the services their children require. As a result, our schools are not only forced to act as hubs for these services but

they are also funding assessments and providing learning equipment out of their own budget. That should never happen and allowed to be happen.

I have said before, and I will say it again, relying on the Jordan's Principle to fund core territorial public services is how government is given honouring the treaties and failed to follow through the commitments made in the name of MMIWG, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and UNDRIP. Actions speak louder than words, and what is happening speaks louder and clear to all who want to hear it.

Every dollar received from Ottawa was a dollar this government failed to provide to necessary territorial services, and where those dollars were going was plain for all to see. Each year that passed was a choice and a choice to say no to Indigenous children and to ignore the treaty rights on education. Later today, I will ask the Minister of Health and Social Services on how she plans to stop shifting her responsibilities onto schools, especially now that the federal government will no longer pick up the tab. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 900-20(1):
TREATY OBLIGATIONS FOR HEALTHCARE

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residents of the Northwest Territories require the best medical treatment that is available to them based on the treaties that were signed with the Crown, not with the Government of the Northwest Territories. These treaty obligations have to be honoured. If the residents have to live by policies and procedures, then we as a government are failing the residents of the NWT and are not obligating these treaties that our former chiefs signed on our behalf.

Mr. Speaker, before Chief Julius, a great Gwich'in chief, put his mark on the paper, it was made clear that he would sign Treaty 11 based on promises from the Crown. Two main promises that he wanted was the best education for his children and the best health care for his people. Conroy, the government agent, stated that as long as you can see that mountain -- and he was referring to Black Mountain -- just north of Teetl'it Zeh, he wanted these promises to be honoured. And today you can still see that mountain, but the treaty promises are not being honoured by the federal government or the territorial governments.

Mr. Speaker, it is time that we change the way that we treat our citizens, especially the Indigenous population of the Northwest Territories, when it pertains to health care. We have to stop answering them based on policies and procedures and provide them with assurance and security that we do, indeed, care for their well-being.

Mr. Speaker, I have been continuously receiving texts, emails, and calls about the way people are being treated when it comes to health care as a whole. They ask when is this type of treatment going to stop and when are they going to be treated with respect and not policies and procedures. Mr. Speaker, patients have been given little to no notice of their appointments, and most times have to cancel or reschedule because the time frame is too short. Patients with special needs are being denied escorts because of the policies. It is time to implement community navigators in the smaller communities who know the residents and their specific needs. Mr. Speaker, the time to provide the best health care to the residents of the Northwest Territories has long passed. Let us start a new page in health care, not based on policies and procedures but practice. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 901-20(1):
THANK YOU TO COLLEAGUES

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to use my Member's statement today to thank everyone for the important work we've completed over the past two-plus weeks. Sometimes it certainly doesn't feel like we've got that work accomplished but there has, indeed, been some good work done, and I'd like to thank the Members of the House for that.

A reminder to us all, Mr. Speaker, that there are still a lot of concerned citizens out there. We have a high cost of energy still, a high cost of food, and certainly we know that there are those struggling with addictions and homelessness, Mr. Speaker, and we always have to keep those front and center on our mind. Mr. Speaker, they are counting on us. They're counting on us to work together as we conclude. So I look forward to concluding the budget process, to create a budget that's good for all Northerners, Mr. Speaker.

And I'd also like to say safe travels for those heading back to their home communities as we take a short break between this session. And thank you all, and, again, safe travels to everyone. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 902-20(1):
ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY FOR TLICHO
CITIZENS

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today there is growing urgency in the Tlicho region felt in Behchoko, Gameti, Wekweeti, and Whati where many families depend on the diamond mines for stable, well-paying work. For decades, the diamond industry has been a cornerstone of opportunity for Tlicho citizens, providing hundreds of jobs and strengthening our local economies. But that foundation is now at risk. The looming closures of Ekati and Gahcho Kue are immediate and serious threat to Tlicho workers. Gahcho Kue paused expansion and financial pressures driven by falling diamond prices and global instability suggests its operating life may shorten. Ekati, meanwhile, has required prior federal support just to continue operating, with warning that even more assistance may be needed if conditions fail to improve. These mines sustains more than 1,000 jobs, Mr. Speaker, across the Northwest Territories, and a significant share of those workers come from Tlicho community. If the mines shut down, the economy shock will hit regions like mine the hardest where alternative employment is already limited.

Mr. Speaker, industry leaders have cautioned that mine closures could trigger population loss and shrinking territorial revenue impacts that would be felt most severely in Indigenous communities like mine.

Mr. Speaker, while the GNWT has introduced temporary relief measures, such as tax adjustments and increased evaluation capacities, these steps address only short-term pressure. They do not answer the larger question facing the Tlicho Nation: What long-term plan exists to ensure workers have real sustainable employment options once the mines are gone.

Our region, Mr. Speaker, has contributed greatly to the prosperity of the Northwest Territories. It is time for the GNWT to demonstrate the same commitment by delivering a clear, forward-looking strategy that protects Tlicho livelihoods beyond the diamond mining era. Mr. Speaker, I will have question for the Minister of ITI. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 903-20(1):
SENIOR ENVOY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF
CANADA

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently, I was speaking to Bob Zimmer. He's the MP in northern BC. He's also the Conservative critic for northern affairs, and the conversation was really interesting. I asked MP Zimmer, are you familiar with the Premier's buddy, you know, that senior envoy in Ottawa who is a self-proclaimed Ottawa expert, insider, knows everything. He said, in short, who? Mr. Speaker, when I asked some more questions, he goes well, I've heard of the guy, and he said he's been unable to reach him. He doesn't even know how to get ahold of him. Mr. Speaker, he did say eventually he did bump into him at one of those wine and cheese functions, you know those ones with the little fancy crackers and stuff where people try to rub elbows and like to think they're bigger than they are. Well, Mr. Speaker, he did corner him and say, hi, let's work together. That was the last contact he had with the NWT \$440,000 senior envoy, Mr. Speaker. Begs the question is what's the value of this MP. Good question. I asked him that -- sorry, senior envoy, from the perspective of this MP. He said well, if you've got a Minister in Cabinet, in government, all that good stuff, he said there is no point. He's doing the job that the Minister is currently doing. I'd consider that an utter failure and disappointment, Mr. Speaker, that our government is paying someone to do our MP's job, open doors.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to that Cabin Radio back in December 2025, and my goodness, Mr. Speaker, that Cabin Radio should have been a situation where someone should have resigned in shame. They didn't clearly lay out a plan. They couldn't articulate what they're doing, and he barely even wanted to answer the question how much that position cost, Mr. Speaker.

And speaking of cost, Mr. Speaker, is this government paying the Premier's buddy a \$440,000 concierge service to do what? To drive people to the hockey games? To pick them up at the airport? Carry their luggage? Take them to the casinos? Take them shopping? I don't know. Nobody knows. There's no transparency, Mr. Speaker. The hubris of this government is beyond unaccountable, Mr. Speaker. It is just confusing.

Mr. Speaker, over the period of this government, over the whole continuum, we will pay \$1.8 million approximately for this guy who has delivered what? Nothing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that I say fire the senior envoy -- because the Premier isn't even

paying attention to my statement -- put that money into health care, put that money into child care, put that money into literacy, give it to seniors, Mr. Speaker. Let's spend it in a real result that gives real meaning to Northerners, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 904-20(1):
WESTERN ARCTIC MARINE TRAINING
CENTRE BRIDGE WATCH RATING
GRADUATION

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Colleagues, on December 12th, 2025, I had the honour of attending the Western Arctic Marine Training Centre's Bridge Watch Rating graduation ceremony in Hay River. This was the second year in a row I've been invited. In true northern way of celebrating the graduates, they had elder Roy Fabian and four youth do an opening pray song.

This remarkable program equips new entrants with essential Transport Canada certifications for bridge watch and deck duties, preparing them for safe, skilled careers at sea. Twelve dedicated students started and successfully completed the intensive 15-week course, earning their credentials. They hailed from across Canada and the North: Hay River, Vernon BC, Fort McPherson, Inuvik, Vancouver BC, Toronto ON, Whitehorse YT, Victoria BC. And proudly, Trenton Diamond 'C from Fort Simpson. Eight were Northerners showcasing the program's draw for locals and beyond.

What makes this initiative stand out? It's fully funded for Northerners through Transport Canada's Oceans Protection Plan, delivered in partnership with BCIT, and includes hands-on simulator training AND safety modules, and marine emergency duties all tailored for remote marine challenges. Students from outside the NWT flock here, excited by their reputation and job-ready outcomes. Past grads have joined the Coast Guard, BC Ferries, and more.

The grads received special messages from Thire Hein, former alumni; Minister Rebecca Alty; Premier Simpson, WAMTC board of director Terry Camsell; and executive director John Vandenberg. This program builds economic opportunities, marine experience, and pride in our North's workforce.

Congratulations to the grads, instructors, and the WAMTC team. I encourage and continue to support to keep attracting talent like Trenton from Fort Simpson in this field of work. Thank you.

Members' statements. Member from Range Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 905-20(1):
NOTICE OF INTENT TO PROCEED WITH
BILL 3

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Rule 8.3(3)(a), I give notice of intent to proceed with Bill 3, Carbon Tax Repeal Act, for further consideration in Committee of the Whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Members' statements. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery. Member from Range Lake.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize a hard-working Range Lake page Adam Kamali. Thank you for being here and supporting our proceedings. It's great to have you as part of our democracy today, Adam. Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to have a page from Yellowknife South. She also happens to be someone I know very well. This is Ms. Savannah Gostlin who is paging for us here today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: I like that red colour. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to quickly recognize Frame Lake page Charlotte Hilton who is in the House today. Again, thank you so much for your service, and we've really been enjoying having the pages in the House, as always, this week. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. I'd like to recognize MaryJane Cazon, our translator from Fort Simpson. She is going to head home today. So MaryJane, have a safe trip home and we'll see you next week.

Recognition of visitors in the gallery. If we missed anyone in the gallery, welcome to your chambers. I hope you are enjoying the proceedings. It's always nice to see people in the gallery.

Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Member from Range Lake.

Reports of Standing and Special Committees

REPORT 35-20(1):
REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE
AUDITOR GENERAL'S 2025 AUDIT OF
PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS IN
THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MR. TESTART: Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts is pleased to provide its Report on the Review of the Auditor General's 2025 Audit of Protected and Conserved Areas in the Northwest Territories and commends it to the House.

INTRODUCTION

The Speaker of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly tabled the Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly - Protected and Conserved Areas in the Northwest Territories on May 23, 2025 ("the audit" or "the report").

The Office of the Auditor General's report provided detailed findings on the GNWT's readiness and capacity to deliver on the Healthy Land, Healthy People: GNWT Priorities for the Northwest Territories Conservation Network 2023-2028 (HLHP) work plan's objectives related to conservation. The audit focused on three outcomes: establishing new protected areas, supporting the effective and equitable management of existing protected and conserved areas, and securing long-term funding for conservation activities.

Protected areas in the NWT operate within a complex inter-governmental landscape, involving Indigenous governments, the federal government, and regional co-management systems. The GNWT's role is shaped by statutory duties under the Protected Areas Act (PAA), its intergovernmental commitments under land claim and self-government agreements, the broader national biodiversity commitments associated with Canada's 2030 targets, and other relevant territorial and federal legislation.

The PAA establishes the territorial framework for creating permanent protected areas through establishment agreements that specify roles, responsibilities, governance structures, and management expectations. Territorial protected areas (TPA) must be co-developed with Indigenous governments, with decisions made

through collaborative processes that reflect Indigenous law, knowledge systems, and stewardship principles. Beyond the PAA, land and resource management in the NWT is also influenced by settled land claim agreements and ongoing negotiations in unsettled areas like the Dehcho. These agreements establish co-management boards, planning processes, consultation obligations, and shared roles in stewardship. The HLHP plan provides a strategic policy framework emphasizing Indigenous-led conservation, long-term sustainability, biodiversity protection, and recognition of cultural continuity.

Committee completed an extensive review of the OAG's report, including holding a public briefing on October 29th, 2025. This is Committee's report on that review with recommendations for the GNWT.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Committee thanks Jerry V. DeMarco, Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development; Carey Agnew, Principal; and Stephanie Moores, Director, for their work on the audit and their briefing. Committee also thanks Karen Hogan, Auditor General of Canada.

Committee also thanks John MacDonald, Secretary to Cabinet and Deputy Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs; Robert Jenkins, Deputy Minister of Environment and Climate Change; and Pamela Strand, Deputy Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment, and their teams for information supporting this review.

REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE auditor general's 2025 AUDIT OF PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Progress Made on Commitments Under Healthy Land, Healthy People

Committee recognizes that the GNWT has made meaningful progress toward ensuring that the territory is on track to achieve outcomes related to protecting biodiversity and ecological integrity while sustaining cultural practices and economic development for current and future generations through its network of protected and conserved areas under the PAA.

The audit confirmed that GNWT has advanced key priorities under the HLHP work plan, including securing long-term financing for Indigenous-led conservation under the Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) agreement, and working to expand and manage the conservation network. While challenges remain in planning, governance, and operational

capacity, committee acknowledges that these efforts represent a significant step forward in building a strong and sustainable framework for land protection and stewardship and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous governments.

To that end, committee acknowledges the significant efforts made by the departments and urges continued collaboration and innovation to strengthen conservation outcomes for future generations through a whole-of-government approach together with Indigenous governments.

Funding and Capacity Constraints

A central finding of the OAG audit was the GNWT's unsustainable reliance on short-term federal funding, which accounted for approximately 41 percent of conservation network expenditures in 2023-2024. Short-term funding creates operational instability, contributing to high turnover rates, unfilled positions, and challenges in meeting timelines for regulatory development, management plans, and monitoring programs.

The PFP agreement represents a major positive step in securing up to \$375 million in long-term financing for Indigenous-led conservation activities. However, the PFP specifically funds Indigenous governments, not the GNWT, and does not replace the GNWT's own operational responsibilities under the PAA or its intergovernmental obligations. As Indigenous governments begin accessing PFP funds, the GNWT must ensure its own capacity keeps pace to avoid delays or gaps in fulfilling its statutory and partnership obligations.

Committee concludes that the GNWT may benefit from increased funding as well as a scaled funding model that reflects the distinct stages of conservation work under the PAA, including Cabinet approval of a candidate area, negotiation of an establishment agreement, regulatory development, and management planning. These stages require coordinated, multi-year departmental effort. Committee therefore makes the following two recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories create a program line item for Conservation Planning and Implementation in the 2027-2028 Main Estimates and adopt staged funding triggers tied to milestones under the Protected Areas Act. And

Recommendation 2: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories stabilize its operational capacity for Territorial

Protected Areas by increasing capacity funding to support management boards and by fully funding the staffing of positions identified in establishment agreements. The government should allocate sufficient resources in the 2027-2028 Main Estimates to close capacity gaps and ensure the effective delivery of management plans, monitoring programs, and Guardians initiatives.

Committee observes that conservation initiatives outside the PAA may follow different processes and funding pathways, and the GNWT's financial responsibilities for this work are not always clearly defined or predictable. Committee observes that a clearer understanding of these obligations is needed, along with a coordinated approach to securing federal support for non-PAA conservation activities. Committee consequently recommends:

Recommendation 3: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories identify its financial obligations and resource requirements for conservation initiatives outside the Protected Areas Act and provide the necessary funding, including working with the federal government to secure appropriate long-term resources for these activities within one year and report back to committee on progress.

Committee's study highlighted that conservation planning occurs over several years, and key activities cannot be completed within a single fiscal cycle. Reliance on annual funding creates uncertainty and slows progress on protected area establishment, management planning, and monitoring. Committee notes that flexible multi-year funding would provide greater predictability and allow resources to align with the timing of conservation work. Committee also recognizes that implementing multi-year funding is challenging under the current constraints of the Financial Administration Act, which limits the GNWT's ability to commit funds across fiscal years. Furthermore, while the financial administration manual (IB 805.02) allows for multi-year ongoing contribution agreements, any uncommitted surplus at the end of a fiscal year is clawed back. Committee is concerned that the existing financial tools for flexible, stable, long-term funding is not adequate for the scope and scale of conservation work and would therefore recommend:

Recommendation 4: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories establish more flexible multi-year financing tools by amending the Financial Administration

Act and related policy instruments to enable funding mechanisms suitable for inter-generational conservation commitments, and to complete this work in time for it to be reflected in the 2027-28 Main Estimates.

Committee is aware that many Indigenous governments face capacity constraints that limit meaningful participation in conservation planning and the implementation of establishment agreements under the PAA. While PFP will provide substantial funding for Indigenous-led conservation work, it is uncertain if Indigenous governments and organizations will have capacity to engage in PAA-related activities. Limited staff, competing priorities, and increasingly complex conservation tables can restrict full participation and slow progress on shared objectives. Committee consequently recommends:

Recommendation 5: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide new capacity funding, including funding new grants and contributions, to provide dedicated new budget and resources to Indigenous governments to support their participation in conservation work under the Protected Areas Act that would not otherwise be covered by Project Finance for Permanence funds.

Candidate Areas Action Plan

The audit found that progress on advancing Dinaga Wek'ehodi and the four Dehcho candidate protected areas has been limited, despite their combined potential to add 23,521 square kilometers of protection, which is significant for meeting territorial and national conservation targets. Decision-making on these sites is complex and requires consensus among multiple Indigenous governments, coordination with ongoing land claim negotiations in the Dehcho, and substantial technical, ecological, cultural, and socio-economic analysis. The Nature Agreement identifies 2028 as the target for completing several of these candidate areas and commits the GNWT to leading annual public reporting on progress beginning in 2025. Committee notes that no structured approach for meeting these obligations has been outlined and that the first annual report has not yet been published. Without a clear action plan, defined milestones, and identified resourcing, the GNWT risks falling behind the 2028 targets and weakening transparency and accountability in the establishment process.

To support the advancement of Dinaga Wek'ehodi and the four Dehcho candidate

protected areas, committee recommends the following:

Recommendation 6: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories table, by the end of the May-June 2026 sitting, a comprehensive action plan for advancing Dinaga Wek'ehodi and the four Dehcho candidate protected areas. The plan should set clear timelines, milestones, and accountability measures aligned with the 2028 Nature Agreement targets and include a strategy for resourcing and capacity support.

Recommendation 7: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories table information, by the end of the May-June 2026 sitting, on how its strategy for advancing candidate protected areas in the Dehcho is coordinated with ongoing land claim negotiations in the region. And.

Recommendation 8: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories publish the annual report committed to in the Nature Agreement including progress on commitments scheduled for the previous fiscal year and anticipated timelines for establishing the candidate protected areas under the Healthy Lands, Healthy People work plan.

Indigenous Hiring and Collaboration with Management Boards

Mr. Speaker, would like to share a quote from the Deputy Minister of Environment and Climate Change who shared with the committee at the public briefing: co-management only works if relationships are healthy.

We emphatically agree.

The audit found that Indigenous representation in hiring for positions associated with TPAs was limited. For the first five years after establishment, management boards were rarely involved in planning or carrying out hiring for roles identified in establishment agreements. Committee finds that this lack of involvement fell short of co-management commitments and has limited opportunities for Indigenous communities to participate directly in stewardship roles.

Although improvements were noted in 2023, participation by management boards remained inconsistent. The audit recommended that the GNWT ensure meaningful board involvement, and the GNWT agreed. At the public briefing on October 29, 2025, officials identified several improvements, including adding board

members to hiring committees, limiting competitions to nearby communities, and seeking board input on job descriptions and recruitment. Committee notes these are positive steps but remains concerned that the GNWT has not identified indicators to measure whether these changes improve Indigenous representation or retention.

The audit also found that the GNWT lacked structured monitoring of progress in implementing establishment agreements. Although agreements require a formal five-year review, work had not begun and no critical path or milestones were in place. Committee agrees this gap risks delays in management planning, monitoring programs, and Guardians initiatives. While GNWT officials have accepted the recommendation and pointed to existing mechanisms such as meetings with management boards, the OAG questioned whether these are sufficient. In the public hearing, the Principal advised that interim check-ins may be needed to complement the five-year review cycle. To support those comments, committee recommends:

Recommendation 9: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories demonstrate how current measures to involve management boards in hiring are improving Indigenous representation and how these measures will be sustained and strengthened. Committee further recommends that the government establish timelines, metrics, and clear indicators of success to show how these actions ensure meaningful community representation in hiring for positions associated with territorial protected areas. And.

Recommendation 10: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories table, by the end of the May-June 2026 sitting, a detailed update, including an implementation framework for territorial protected area agreements, that responds fully to the auditor general's recommendation at paragraph 56 of the audit report.

Activities and Permitting within Protected and Conserved Areas

The audit confirms that the core instruments for TPAs remain unfinished or only partially in place. Draft regulations for Thaidene Nene were co-developed but not finalized, related policies remain interim or in draft, and management plans for both Thaidene Nene and Ts'ude Niline Tuyeta were not completed within five years of their establishment agreements. These gaps delay dependent work such as monitoring programs and create

uncertainty for decision makers and proponents.

Committee finds that the lack of finalized regulations, approved management plans, and consolidated permitting guidance has left boards and proponents relying on interim tools and ad hoc coordination. This slows implementation of establishment agreements and undermines confidence in the permitting system. The audit's "partially completed" status for regulations and policies, combined with missed plan timelines, demonstrates the need for permanent rules and a clear pathway for activities within TPAs. As such, committee recommends:

Recommendation 11: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories finalize the regulations for Thaidene Nene and bring forward any outstanding policy instruments required for Thaidene Nene and Ts'ude Niline Tuyeta, sequenced with the approval of management plans and supported by publicly shared target dates within one year. And

Recommendation 12: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories update the regulatory, legislative, and policy framework so that it works coherently with territorial protected areas under the Protected Areas Act and resolves existing gaps. The GNWT should begin the required policy work to identify and assess options for legislative amendments and bring forward recommended changes for decision. Timelines for this work should be expedited, with milestones for delivery within the lifetime of the 20th Legislative Assembly.

Government Leadership

Leadership in conservation requires GNWT to coordinate across departments, anticipate pressures from increased Indigenous-led conservation initiatives, and ensure its processes are transparent, timely, and well resourced. The audit's Exhibit 4 identified key factors that enabled the successful negotiation of the PFP agreement, including stable representation, shared work planning, sufficient capacity, cultural practices, and strong facilitation. Applying these practices to TPA establishment and implementation could strengthen GNWT's leadership and improve outcomes across the conservation network.

Committee affirms that GNWT must respect Indigenous governments' right to lead conservation in their regions, and at the same time provide clear direction and ensure

territorial commitments are met. GNWT cannot defer leadership by suggesting that progress depends solely on Indigenous capacity or availability. It must set a coordinated plan for protected and conserved areas, align targets across departments, and resource delivery.

Committee believes a strong approach requires the GNWT to convene partners through established intergovernmental forums like the Northwest Territories Council of Leaders and the Intergovernmental Council of the Northwest Territories, set timelines, remove policy and regulatory barriers, and ensure coordinated, timely decision-making across the government. Lessons from the successful PFP negotiations show the value of stable representation, shared work plans, cultural practices, and effective facilitation, and the GNWT should apply these practices to protected and conserved area establishment and implementation.

Recommendation 13: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories table, in the May-June 2026 sitting, a plan that sets out how the government will lead conservation planning in collaboration with partners through the Northwest Territories Council of Leaders and the Intergovernmental Council of the Northwest Territories without overriding Indigenous authorities; outlines the sequence of Government of the Northwest Territories decisions required to advance each protected area; and commits to a public, milestone-based update each November, as part of the reporting obligations under the Nature Agreement, to summarize progress and any variance from plan.

Recommendation 14: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories establish a process to obtain independent reviews, including legal or analytical reviews conducted through an Indigenous lens, when co-management partners encounter an impasse. Committee notes that progress on implementing accepted audit recommendations is not always timely and that the GNWT lacks clear mechanisms to hold senior leadership accountable for delivery. Establishing a link between deputy minister performance management and the implementation of accepted recommendations would strengthen accountability and help ensure sustained, on-schedule action on conservation commitments.

Recommendation 15: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories establish an audit performance plan for deputy ministers. The plan should link

performance pay to timely implementation of Office of the auditor general of Canada audit recommendations that have been accepted by the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Reconciliation

Historic harms and systemic exclusion of Indigenous peoples from land stewardship and governance have left legacies that continue to affect trust and relationships. Some of these harms are recent, making rebuilding trust more challenging. These unresolved issues can impede efforts to work together on shared priorities such as conservation, even when frameworks for collaboration exist. Moving forward requires acknowledging these harms, issuing public apologies where appropriate, and actively creating space for Indigenous leadership while ensuring governments fulfill their responsibilities as partners.

Committee acknowledges that the GNWT enacted the UNDRIP Implementation Act, (UNDRIPIA) which commits the GNWT to harmonizing its laws and policies with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. UNDRIPIA came into force on October 6, 2023, and requires the Minister, in collaboration and cooperation with Indigenous governments or organizations of the NWT and the executive council, co-develop an action plan to achieve the objectives of the Declaration within two years of coming into force. Committee notes that this legislative timeline has passed. The action plan was not tabled during the October 2025 sitting, and the required public engagement has not occurred.

To give full effect to these commitments and demonstrate progress, committee recommends that GNWT take immediate steps to operationalize the Act and embed UNDRIP principles into conservation policy and practice. Conservation is an area where reconciliation must be visible and measurable. Committee further recommends that GNWT engage Indigenous leadership meaningfully by using the Council of Leaders and other fora with Indigenous governments and organizations to guide this work and creating forums for dialogue that build trust, consensus, and shared decision-making.

Recommendation 16: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories examine specific historical harms that have been raised by Indigenous governments and communities, identify those that warrant a formal apology and compensation, and take timely action to deliver those apologies along with appropriate reparations.

Recommendation 17: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide an update on the status of the action plan required by section 10 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Implementation Act. And

Recommendation 18: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide sufficient funding in the 2026-2027 Main Estimates and establish ongoing multi-year implementation funding, including capacity funding for Indigenous governments and organizations, to support and sustain participation in the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Implementation Act until implementation is fully achieved.

CONCLUSION

This concludes the Standing Committee on Public Accounts' Report on the Review of the Auditor General's 2025 Audit of Protected and Conserved Areas in the Northwest Territories. Committee looks forward to the Government's response, and their provision of details as to how they will implement these recommendations.

Recommendation 19: The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a response to this report within 120 days. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Reports of standing and special committees. Member from Range Lake.

MOTION TO RECEIVE AND REFER
COMMITTEE REPORT 35-20(1) TO
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE,
CARRIED

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Nunakput, that Committee Report 35-20(1), Standing Committee on Public Accounts Report on the Review of the Auditor General's 2025 Audit of Protected and Conserved Areas in the Northwest Territories, be received by the Assembly and referred to Committee of the Whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? Any abstentions? The motion is carried. Committee

Report 35-20(1), Standing Committee on Public Accounts Report on the Review of the Auditor general's 2025 Audit of Protected and Conserved Areas in the Northwest Territories, has been received and will be moved into the Committee of the Whole for further consideration.

Reports of standing and special committees. Returns to oral questions. Acknowledgements. Oral Questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 1056-20(1): MEDICAL TRAVEL

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I will be asking questions of my favourite health Minister today, and it's with respect to wait times.

Mr. Speaker, I was looking at the health and social services dashboard on wait times. Thank you very much for having that very important piece of information. But I don't find that it actually tracks specifics when you tie months to actual wait times. It says wait times by month is not the same in the sense of tracking them in the context of getting results. So in other words, it says we have people on priority, but it doesn't actually say who we actually serve. Does the department actually do an analysis as to how many referrals it has in the context of how many we actually see? Thank you.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't have that level of detail.

MR. HAWKINS: Yes, thank you very much. I mean, the website is helpful. It's a little on the confusing side where it says referral count and then wait times, but I am not actually seeing where it transposes.

Mr. Speaker, is there any cost analysis ever done by the Department of Health and Social Services that looks into is it cheaper to bring specialists to the Northwest Territories rather than sending them to south using the medical travel process and therein lies the question. Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the health authority's preference is to bring specialists to the Northwest Territories; however, all the specialists are not always available to travel to

the Northwest Territories as they service Alberta residents at the same time. So within access to care, we provide them with the travel to Alberta for that care. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Minister's answer. Yes, there's some specialists that come here. The eye guy, I don't know what his name is, but he sees hundreds of people all at once. Excellent use of resources.

Mr. Speaker, is the Minister able to share what analysis they do on these types of appointments and strategies with me and my colleagues, including the public, because I can't find any analysis or strategy on the website on how we try to find the best way to do this business. Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, over the years there's been many different ways to try and analyze this and right now, what this government has done is we have highlighted the medical travel piece, which also includes out-of-territory physician services, which is being analyzed right now by the health sustainability unit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1057-20(1): PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So my questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services following up on my Member's statement.

So my understanding was that the public administrator was to be appointed for a one-year term with possibility of extension. As I noted in my Member's statement, the public administrator has so far failed to deliver most of the deliverables laid out in the work plan. So my first question for the Minister, is there a defined end date for the term of the public administrator or is the contract to be extended as long as there continues to be unfinished work? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in December, myself, the public administrator, the deputy minister, we briefed committee on the public -- the Minister's work plan. There, however -- so there are many areas that the public administrator has been directed to work on. There are some things that are -- some deliverables that have had extended timelines due to certain aspects, but I don't agree with the comment that there are many -- there are many of the things that are in progress. There are a lot that have been completed. There is still some work that, you know, is delayed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't really hear an answer to the first question. But following up on the Minister's comments, are there firm deadlines in place to ensure that those deliverables that are overdue will be received in time to make meaningful change during the life of this government? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes, there are timelines. And like any other year we have, we ended up having delays. You know, there was the Dehcho journey that was part of this mapping of -- you know, with medical travel. That was one piece that was delayed. There are many different parts that are going on. And the Member's statement was people strategy. Well, when we went out and we heard from the -- myself, the public administrator, the deputy administrator, and the CEO went out and heard from staff, there was a lot more outside of the health and social services NTHSSA area so we had to go out and work with other departments to see how we could work together to try and fit in some of the requests that were being made by staff for this retention strategy. So there are other things that we are continuing to work on.

And the timeline for the public administrator is -- his contract is up in December, and we are on track with where we are with the plan for governance. And once we have made that decision, then we'll transition to that before the year is over. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the Minister for providing clarity on the first couple of questions.

So can the Minister speak to what barriers have been removed or what issues have now been resolved that would give this House more assurance that the deliverables can actually be

completed by December of this year? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the main part of -- you know, and other Members have stressed this, was we -- the main part was for the public administrator to ensure that what messaging was coming from this government through our priorities was being actioned within the NTHSSA. And with that direct line, we've now been able to focus on areas where we -- and I've said in this House, we have been focusing on not just on small communities, on the high priority, the areas that are most important to the residents, which is that first contact. And within that, the priorities -- the other piece was is to ensure that the, you know, NTHSSA's budget is -- budget is appropriate size for the services that we require them and we are expecting them to do. And that work has been going on. And within the mandate -- within the public administrator's mandate, he's got until this next year to have that budget so that way the next budget that's put forward is more in line with a balanced budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1058-20(1):
SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST
SERVICES OFFERED IN SCHOOL

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Mr. Speaker, my question is what is the provision of speech-language therapy and social and emotional support being left to the schools instead of being administered by the Minister of Health and Social Services? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, within the mental health and speech-language, both -- for years, both the education and I think when -- and within health have had separate budgets, so the K to 12 I can't speak to that. That can go to the Minister. But where the health authority lies is when those children have needs for speech and those can -- those referrals are made to the speech pathology through a referral process. And they can be self-referral from families, from physicians, from the schools. And we provide those services; however, you know, right now we're challenged with a lot of vacancies. With mental health, I know with the CYCs, we

have -- we initiated this program, I believe, 2018-2019. All of the mental health work was done under health and social services but after a two-year or three-year review, I believe there was a large push from education bodies to want to be more involved and have more of that within their authority and so that's why the change was made at the beginning -- to make the change at the beginning of this government, to split that so that part of the work was done in education and the clinical expertise would stay in health. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is why is the Minister forcing schools to use their budgets for children's assessments and essential learning equipment when the schools aren't equipped to deliver these services and don't have the funding and trying to tap into the surplus dollars doesn't work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would have to get more information as to what the Member is referring to as I wouldn't be able to respond to that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Much of the cuts to Jordan's Principle education funding supported services that are the responsibility of the Minister of health. Will she take the pressure off ECE and provide parents with timely access to assessments and to support their children with complex needs and requirements instead of forcing schools to fill that role? Mr. Speaker, education and health and social services are treaty rights. Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what I would like to say on that is that, you know, in this House, you know, we've heard time and time again how it's impacted within education; however, a lot of these supports are -- you know, I think -- we know we don't have enough positions or whatever in ECE -- in the schools. You know, we're bound by what our budget is. We're bound to be able to provide the services, and we try to reallocate as much to the programs as we can. Within health and social services, it's the same area. Jordan's Principle has been supporting health and social services as well because education and health is both. And this is why myself and the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, as well as everybody from Cabinet, has been meeting and bringing this issue up, how it's impacting the Indigenous students especially in the Northwest Territories, and even more so in the smallest communities.

When you look across Canada, you know, the smallest communities, the Indigenous communities are reserves, and that's the decision that they made before the new Minister came in, that they would only fund reserves. We've tried to educate them on the Northwest Territories that our small communities make up -- are mostly Indigenous kids so we need to be able to have this funding as well in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1059-20(1):
DIAMOND MINE ASSET RETIREMENT
AND REPURPOSING

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

In 2021, the GNWT participated with many stakeholders, including Indigenous governments, on the Re-Imagining Closure project around mine closure and where ideas of common ground could be found about repurposing assets, among other ideas. Can the Minister tell me the status of conversations between the GNWT and other stakeholders and diamond mines as they close around asset repurposing? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories continues to support our diamond mines in conversations with potential stakeholders for assets. The diamond mines also are pursuing potential new uses of their assets themselves as well. That's everything from working with -- or sorry, ensuring that Indigenous governments understand what potential opportunities there are right down to their staff. So, for example, they have things like boats that are on site and ensuring that they are working kind of through their own stakeholder priority list as they near closure, has been a priority of theirs, and where we can we have supported those conversations as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. REID: Thank you to the Minister for that. And I know the Minister is aware I have a passionate constituent who asks a lot of questions about this, so thank you.

Can the Minister tell me if as outlined in those conversations in the 2021 report on Re-Imagining Closure if an Arctic research and

development centre continues to be a part of this conversation? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, as you know there is a tremendous amount of assets. These are billion-dollar diamond mines that we have operating in the Northwest Territories that have a significant amount of infrastructure that could potentially be repurposed in a multitude of ways, whether that is a research centre, a logistics hub, or potentially processing of different types of minerals, depending on what type of adjustments can be made to processing plants. These are conversations that we continue to have. We as a government certainly don't have the pockets deep enough to continue to support this level of infrastructure without kind of a known use for it, but we continue to provide different ideas to, for example our federal partners as well, as we explore different opportunities within the Northwest Territories whether that is through critical minerals, through opportunities that exist with Arctic security as well. So we continue to make sure that all of our partners are aware of the level of infrastructure that does exist in the Northwest Territories and the potential opportunities that they present. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of ITI. Final supplementary. Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister for that. I know she has a lot of opportunities to speak to various partners, including federal partners, on topics such as these, including the assets of the mines as they reach their closure.

Mr. Speaker, can she tell me if -- especially in Arctic security, Mr. Speaker, can she tell me if there is interest of the Department of National Defence to utilize some of these airfields and airstrips in their future planning? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, it's not just us that's talking to our counterparts within the federal government. The mines themselves, I know of one in particular that is also doing their part to ensure that these opportunities are known to the federal government, and where and when we can, we support these conversations as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1060-20(1):
EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE
CENTRES STATISTICAL DATA
COLLECTION

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, child care providers have been reaching out to MLAs recently and they feel that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment is forcing them to collect sensitive personal information, including ethnicity and sex assigned at birth, and they feel that they are under threat of losing funding if they refuse. Forcing families to disclose this information as a condition of service to access or funding constitutes indirect or adverse effect discrimination, non-voluntary statistical reporting. Providers now feel caught between compliance and protecting families' privacy, putting them at legal and ethical risk. So I'd like to ask the Minister responsible how does ECE justify mandatory collection of ethnicity and sex assigned at birth despite clear human rights protections? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Range Lake. Minister of ECE.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the demographic information that is found within the regulations for education, culture and employment's early learning and child care regulations is not new information that's being collected. I think it's worth stating here, Mr. Speaker, that this information, while listed in the regulations and while asked of early learning and child care providers to collect it, is not then collected by ECE and it is not mandatory that they collect it and then receive funding for it. No one is not receiving funding. So funding is still flowing. It is also an option for child care providers to simply note on their forms that a parent declined to provide this information, and that is respected as well by the department. But it is very important that parents and child care providers know that funding is not being withheld for not providing that information, and ECE does not maintain that information within the department. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that's good news, but that's not what's being communicated clearly because that's why we're getting complaints. So can the Minister explain why this happened? Why was individual-level non-anonymized data collection suggested to providers instead of typical aggregated, anonymized statistical reporting as we see in federal programs? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, this information is found in the regulations in

anticipation of information requests for reporting to the federal government. But without clear indication from the federal government as to how they intend to use that information and how that information can be ensured that it is respecting the privacy of Northerners, ECE is not collecting it from child care providers and is not providing it, obviously, to the federal government either. So while we are asking that ELCC providers, so daycare providers, collect that information and have it on file for families, if families decline to provide that information that is something that can be placed on a form. Like I said, that information is not collected and maintained by ECE and is certainly, obviously, not handed over to the federal government either. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you to the Minister for making that clear. Will the Minister endeavour to communicate with all early childhood providers and let them know -- clarify this position so there's no more confusion, they're not under this misapprehension that they're going to lose funding if they don't do this, and that they can clearly indicate that parents decline. Can the Minister commit to sending out letters or using the departmental resources to get that clarification out so there is no more confusion in the territory. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, I have a draft here that will go out to MLAs, and at the exact same time communication will also go out to child care providers as well today. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1061-20(1):
MACKENZIE VALLEY HIGHWAY ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following up on my statement earlier, my question today is to the Minister of strategic infrastructure.

Will the Minister of strategic infrastructure expand on the current steering committee to include the Indigenous governments of PKFN and the Gwich'in Tribal Council? Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am already in contact quite regularly with all three of the Indigenous governments who are lining the ultimate route of the Mackenzie Valley Highway. The current MOU exists between the GNWT and SSI. We also have a work plan signed with the Pehdzeh Ki First Nation and certainly am looking and hopeful that we will see an expansion in a formal capacity to bring all three groups, or all four groups with the GNWT, into a formal agreement. So certainly supportive of that, Mr. Speaker. The next step really will be to do that in alignment with the timing preferred by those Indigenous governments. But I am -- as I say, I am in contact with them, and I am expecting that we will get to that place as this project moves forward. Thank you.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the Minister for that reply. Greatly appreciated that.

My second question, Mr. Speaker, will the Minister provide this group, once it's established, with SEED capital money, particularly to the other groups outside of SSI. SSI has some funding already. Mahsi.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's different pots of money that may all be available and, firstly, any and everyone interested in opening a business or expanding a business along the Mackenzie Valley Highway can and should be reaching out to their regional ITI department. That is an opportunity to create businesses and to expand businesses, build businesses, as we anticipate work on this project to move forward quickly in the next little while.

There's also funding that is managed through strategic infrastructure with respect to the capacity and work readiness. So just last week, as the Member would know having been with them, we began the work of getting work readiness groups together on the first phase of the project with those communities, and there is funding available for that. As we move into the second phase and expand that work, I expect similar funding will become available so that we can get groups up and running so they have the work readiness capacity to be ready, not only for construction but for what comes next. So it's coming, Mr. Speaker. I am very much committed to it, and I appreciate the question. Thank you.

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

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am glad we got some startup capital that's forthcoming.

My next question there, Mr. Speaker, is what negotiations are underway with the federal government for the announced Arctic infrastructure fund back in November, that pot of money, one-third is for the NWT. I just want to know what the plans are for that Arctic infrastructure fund. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say I've had the chance to speak to the Minister of Transportation. I know the Premier has as well. We've certainly taken this up with respect to wanting to make sure that that fund gets utilized appropriately. It's only an amount that starts to get at some of the needs we have. It does not build the road entirely. So I am not sure if it's going to be a one-third or if it's going to be project-allocated. We have been certainly, and I think with our sister and brother territories, saying that this is not going to be enough in a big sense. But we've been front and center already, as I say, both myself, the Premier, other Ministers as well, explaining the three major projects that we have, being in the major projects office, and so I am confident we'll get our share of it, Mr. Speaker. And my point simply being that this Arctic infrastructure fund isn't necessarily going to be what builds the Mackenzie Valley Highway. It's going to be just part of what can get us over the hurdle of all of the major projects that we have. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1062-20(1):
SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT FOLLOWING
DIAMOND MINE CLOSURES

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents are nervous at this time with mine closure because this will have an impact on their livelihood. So with that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of ITI what specific long-term diversification initiatives is the department developing to ensure sustainable employment opportunities for regions like the Tlicho once Ekati and Gahcho Kue cease operations. Thank you.

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

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

do have a diverse economy in the Northwest Territories. We do not have a diverse GDP. So a lot of our GDP still comes from diamond mining in the Northwest Territories, and we're working hard as a Cabinet to make sure that we're diversifying our GDP. That includes things like investing in housing to make sure that we have construction projects and we're continuing to increase our construction allotment from our GDP. We're investing in health care. We're investing in, for example, adding more schools to our capital planning for large infrastructure and increasing our small capital investments as well for school infrastructure. In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we're working as a Cabinet to ensure that we're streamlining our regulatory process to make it easier for -- and more efficient for more mines to come online. In addition, Mr. Speaker, we have other opportunities in the territory that are coming up or exist today. An example of that is Giant Mine remediation and making sure that I am working quite closely with, for example Tlicho Investment Corporation, on maximizing the opportunities that exist from that work out there to make sure that we have as many Tlicho and YKDFN residents from the Yellowknife area that are working on that project. Thank you.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, well, I just wanted to tell the Minister that, you know, I think they need to start focusing on decentralization, give us more jobs. Mr. Speaker, what concrete transition supports such as retraining programs, apprenticeship opportunities, or partnerships with Indigenous governments, are being planned to help Tlicho workers who may lose their jobs in the coming years?

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, through education, culture and employment we have a suite of programs that employers have access to in order to do retraining with staff. This can be something, you know, like upgrading programs but can also be more on-the-job training, so specific for certifications required for them to evolve into a new position. We're also pursuing more funding through the federal government specific to industries that have been impacted by tariffs. And this is one such industry that exists in the Northwest Territories that has seen impact because of tariffs from the United States. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of ITI. Final supplementary. Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what has the GNWT done to prepare for the potential economic and population impacts that experts warn could

follow mine closures, especially in our smaller regional communities? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as an entire Cabinet, we have asked okay, where we can put some additional dollars that really not only achieve our economic goals in the territory but make sure that we're also achieving our social goals. We're at a point in time, Mr. Speaker, where we have to make sure that our investments are multi-use, just like our infrastructure, and so that includes looking at investments that speak to both our social and our economic needs in the territory, hence housing and health care investments, as well as investments in education.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, we've ensured that we're working quite closely with our partners, understanding that mine closures will have an impact in the Northwest Territories. We know across Canada that it takes many years to see a mine open and so the work that we're doing today in trying to make sure that we're doing short-term and long-term work as a Cabinet is work that really should have been done years ago, but we're up to the challenge, Mr. Speaker, in making sure that we're having these conversations with stakeholders so that people are aware of the programs we have available. We have a website dedicated to help after mine closure so that people have all of that information consolidated in one space, and making sure that as a Cabinet we're pursuing new opportunities for this entire territory. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1063-20(1):
HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to be continuing on a similar thread to my previous colleague. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of ECE and ITI.

Mr. Speaker, does the Minister agree that transformational investment in growing the knowledge economy in the Northwest Territories is needed for economic diversification to secure our future? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes. I agree. Thank you.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Excellent, I am very glad the Minister agrees.

So with that, considering the success that we have seen the Yukon and Nunavut governments have had recently in attracting post-secondary investment, what is the Minister doing to work with Aurora College to leverage third party investment in our territory? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in addition to making sure that third party investments was included in the mandate agreement with the Aurora College board of governors, I've also ensured that if I know of any programs or funding sources that I am sharing that information with Aurora College, with their board of governors. I know that because of that they have pursued specific funding that is relevant for their housing desires. I've also confirmed with them that should they want to travel to Ottawa together in order to meet with federal counterparts on some of these opportunities or with other third party funders that I am more than happy to pair these meetings up with other travel that I do in my role as Minister. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I am happy to hear that the Minister is collaborating with the college.

Mr. Speaker, I note that the college recently received good news about their CAQC process, so it looks like pieces are starting to line up on the transition. Can the Minister confirm that the Polytechnic University Act will move ahead in this Assembly in order to support that transition? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're certainly working on the required legislation for the Aurora College Polytechnic. That work has not stopped. That includes pieces like establishing a framework for that, evaluating what clauses from the existing Aurora College Act would be imported into new legislation, and also looking at the legislation or university or polytechnic legislation from other jurisdictions like the Yukon, speaking with counterparts over there as well, to find out information like what has served them well, what they would have liked to have seen different or what they feel would be other opportunities, so making sure that we're also pulling from lessons learned from other jurisdictions as we complete this work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1064-20(1):
RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS TREATMENT
SERVICES

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to return to a subject similar to the one I just asked earlier to the health Minister but also in this Assembly, which is rheumatoid arthritis, Mr. Speaker.

Over 300 cases in the NWT are active in the sense of people need regular and ongoing treatment, some twice a year, sometimes up to four times a year, and have to fly to Edmonton for treatment. So the point being here is, Mr. Speaker, is there a better way. Rheumatoid arthritis requires a \$300,000 paycheck. Has there been any analysis on understanding for value for service? So in other words, has the Minister, and her department obviously, done any work on analyzing the cost effectiveness of bringing a rheumatoid doctor to the Northwest Territories to provide clinic treatments? Thank you.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what the Member is saying is what we do want. We want to be able to recruit and have specialists to be able to come to the Northwest Territories to do this. We do know that it's hard on our residents to have to travel all the time. It's -- you know, there's costs involved with that. However, right now I know that they do have -- they are working collaboratively with the Alberta Health Services to try and recruit within their -- because it's within their jurisdiction, to be able to recruit many of these specialists, you know, coming to the Northwest Territories. You know, if we put out the positions, and we have in the past, the agreements that we've had with other specialists, there's nobody that wants to move here right now in these positions. And so even with recruitment, trying to do that. So we're closely working with Alberta Health Services. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Now, Mr. Speaker, there are a whole suite of services when it comes to specialists. I am just going to call them specialists. So what type of analysis specifically are we doing? So in other words, have they done business case analysis studying about bringing these types of specialists to the Northwest Territories to run clinics here? And if that's the case, can the Minister share that with people like me? Furthermore, if it isn't the case, would she just say that? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The work that's being done, the analysis that's being done on the out-of-territory physician services, is in the -- the analysis is being completed within the health sustainability unit team. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, that's a lot of information that doesn't say a whole lot. So, Mr. Speaker, can the Minister be very specific and share what analysis that have actually been done and targeted to particular specialists so we can see what type of business case models the department is considering; would she share that information? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what I can do is I will go back to the NTHSSA and have a conversation with them of what they have done in the past; however, everything that they have done in the past and in these analyses, they are working closely with the health sustainability unit as that is one -- I believe that there's six or seven targeted areas, and that is one of them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1065-20(1):
COMMUNITY NAVIGATORS IN SMALLER
COMMUNITIES

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one question related to my Member's statement. You know, our people were not brought up on specific policies and procedures but brought up on what's best suited for their specific needs. Today, every aspect of our lives revolves around policies and procedures. You know, I get calls regularly saying, you know, they have medical needs but due to policies and procedures, I have to tell them they are not entitled to specific medical needs.

My question to the Minister is will the Minister and her department look at implementing a community navigator position into our smaller communities so that our residents' specific medical needs -- and get them the services that they require in the immediate future? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what we do have for the

Inuvik region, which services all of the communities, is we do have an Indigenous patient health navigator. However, within our health services and all our health centres, anyone needing information around the services that they can -- they do provide and how to access those services should be readily available by any health centre. So if there's information that the Member is wanting exactly, you know, feel free to reach out to my office so we can have -- you know, we can send out to the health centres specifically some information for them to provide to the public. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1066-20(1):
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HEALTH AND
SOCIAL SERVICES AUTHORITY DEFICITS

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second set of questions is also to the Minister of Health and Social Services, and I'd like to dig into some of the specific unfinished deliverables laid out in the public administrator work plan.

So my understanding was that one of the top, top priorities for the PA was to ensure the health authority stops deficit budgeting, essentially balances budget. And there was initial indication that we would see that in last year's mains and then further expectation it would be in these current mains. So for the Minister, what would lead us to believe we should expect a balanced budget by next year's mains? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the public administrator has been working hard with the CEO and the NTHSSA executive to bring forward, over the last couple of years, a lot of the areas they were targeting in forced growth and enhancements that they previously have done. So if people don't -- like, most people don't understand that the authority was continuing to just put in areas where there was high pressure, high needs, and that's what was driving up the deficit; however, within this government we, you know, as Cabinet and as myself as Minister, once we got the public administrator in, that piece was directed on ensuring that any forced growth submissions and all those things were targeting areas that were drivers of the deficit. So this past year, the budget that was -- was less than the previous year, and so I think before the end

of this government, this is where we are expecting -- and, you know, throughout the situation, we didn't want it to impact patients' care. And so by just cutting the budget was not effective. It was working within, finding from within, tightening up areas where, you know, spending might -- you know, where we could -- if it didn't impact patient care. And so those things have been completed over the years, and I am looking -- you know, I -- you know, within the next little while, we'll be getting the NTHSSA's budget for the 2026-2027 year, and I am pretty sure that, you know, and from the information that I've been getting on quarterly updates, that we will have a more -- closer to the budget yearend. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So one of the things that was supposed to help balance the budget was work to streamline and reduce duplication between the governance and administration of the HSS and the health authorities. So when will we see changes or at least recommendations to that effect? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my deputy minister and the public administrator are working on this, you know, and I believe that they will be coming forward to me with this information. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So can the Minister explain the reason for the delay in the release of the people strategy, especially because it was touted to be absolutely key in health care workforce stabilization and it was initially supposed to be released last June. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the previous health recruitment strategy and the bridging strategy was all within the -- you know, what the NTHSSA could control. And so year after year, staff were frustrated and frustrated and frustrated because many of the issues that they were bringing forward were not in the recruitment strategy. So there are -- the things that we left -- there are still the things that are good that are going to remain in the strategy, but the scope of the people strategy expanded to an all-of-government initiative creating additional coordination. And so there is, like I mentioned, like, housing and different areas. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1067-20(1):
TREATY RIGHTS TO EDUCATION

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of ECE. Right now, the way I see it is that the GNWT education, health and -- sorry, education and health policies are overriding our treaty rights.

My question is, in May 2025 the ECE Minister announced DEA to use their surplus dollars for JP cutbacks. My question is what happens -- sorry, my question is what happens when DEA does not have surplus dollars, what will her department do to fill in the gap and shortfalls going forward with all DEAs in Northwest Territories and to uphold and honour the treaty rights on education though? 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. So, Mr. Speaker, when I met with all of the chairs of the district education councils across the Northwest Territories, I endeavoured to pass along to them that if there were emergencies that came up, because often this is what school boards end up using their surplus dollars for, that we would stay in close contact together in order to explore what it was that they endeavoured to need the funding for. Surpluses are borne out of carryovers from unused funds that are distributed to education bodies through the school funding formula. And so what we want, ultimately, is not for those dollars to be sitting in a surplus but to be used for education across the territory and that if there are unforeseen circumstances that arise that we work together in order to sort those out and figure out how we can either fund them or wait for follow-up years but certainly always sticking together and working together. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. EDJERICON: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question: Can the Minister explain how she will work with the health Minister to do proper education assessment for students who needs the help? And how will the Minister pay to implement the assessment without taking the money out of the DEA budget? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, yesterday in questions that I received from the Member for

Yellowknife North, we explored the question around early assessments for students, especially in the early years, to ensure that we're establishing baselines and making sure that we are discovering any concerns or challenges that might arise as early as possible. And so that is something that we are looking into within education, culture and employment. And I continue to work quite closely with the Minister of Health and Social Services.

And in addition to that, the Member's second question around funding, this relates directly to work being done within the inclusive schooling policy, Mr. Speaker, and so this is work that is currently underway within the department. Thank you.

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

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister as well. Whenever she gets a chance to go to Ottawa to work with -- and including her colleagues, the Minister of health, maybe when you guys go down there I am hoping that you continue to emphasize the importance of treaty rights on education and health and that we need additional funding. I just want to make sure that we are covered off in that area. So that's my question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, when we travel, whether it's individually or all together as a group or with Council of Leaders, we are certainly making sure that we are explaining the realities of life in the Northwest Territories, the treaties that we honour here in the Northwest Territories, the work that we do together, and the needs of residents of this territory as well. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1068-20(1):
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION FUNDING

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to continue on the thread earlier regarding post-secondary. I know the Minister -- one of the tasks is getting the post-secondary funding formula in place. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister share an update with us on the dates and process involved in that and when we can expect to see it. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the post-secondary institution funding formula, specifically for Aurora College, is something that would flow from the legislation. The legislation itself would have information about what is expected of the institution and funding that would potentially come from that. And so that is work that would follow the legislation that needs to be developed first. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I was looking for was perhaps an update on how that work is going, where we're at with it, and when we expect it to come to the floor. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the legislation itself needs to follow the CAQC process. So the CAQC process is currently underway between Aurora College and the CAQC. Once we receive a recommendation either way from the CAQC, we would be able to proceed from there, and that will help form the detail that would be found in the legislation. The legislation then needs to be tabled in this House and go through the process that is laid out by this House. And once that is passed, it would come after that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And if the Minister could comment a bit on how that funding formula might be used to enhance accountability with the college and align funding with the results that we're looking for, speaking to what I was speaking to earlier today. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, we have developed a framework within education, culture and employment that holds post-secondary institutions accountable. It uses metrics. We've just started that in the life of this Assembly. That's information that would continue to flow, and certainly metrics like that, success metrics, would be used in research that would be used to develop a school funding formula as well down the road. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1069-20(1):
HEALTH SYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY UNIT

MR. TESTART: Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Premier about the healthcare system sustainability unit. The unit is diligently working away at inventorying medical costs to the healthcare system. We're now hearing a lot of the decisions that we're asking about on the floor as it relates to the healthcare system are dependent on data or reports that are going to be produced by this unit. So is the unit on track to meet its reporting timelines of a preliminary sustainability report by mid-year this fiscal? Thank you. Or, sorry, calendar year. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the healthcare system sustainability unit is looking at different areas in the healthcare system and doing an analysis. It's going to provide that analysis to Cabinet to help us make determinations about future budgeting and future structure of the healthcare system.

The work is ongoing. It is a little behind schedule, but we're going to have hopefully all of the information we need and if not, we'll have the vast majority of the information we need prior to the upcoming budget cycle, so that for next year's main estimates we'll be able to factor in that analysis. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that's disappointing but -- because it is important work. But my concern about it is if it's just for Cabinet and we don't get to see it or the public gets to see it, we're letting the unit decide what is core. Right? They're defining non-core or discretionary medical services. We're letting this unit decide what Northerners need and what Northerners don't, and that could have big impacts because the most expensive services are definitely in small communities. So will the Minister commit to transparency around this process so we can make sure we all have an understanding of what core services are and what non-core services are? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And so just to correct the record, I know that we don't do a lot of correcting of misinformation in this House, but the unit is not going to make a determination about what core services are. So the way that government works is that public servants will provide advice to decision-makers, the Ministers, and then those Ministers will make decisions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, of course Ministers are the final word. That's how governments work. I think everyone understands that. Mr. Speaker, the unit has spent two years inventorying problems that frontline staff have been complaining about for a decade. So why are we spending \$2 million a year of federal money on an administrative process to build more plans, to build more studies, when we could be putting it into frontline services like an MRI machine or even security in the waiting room, in the emergency room, Mr. Speaker? That's what's important to Northerners, and until we actually see what this plan is it's all talk. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I was in Cabinet four years prior to becoming Premier, and during that time I had a lot of questions about the expenditures in the healthcare system, and despite repeated requests for information I had trouble receiving it. And, Mr. Speaker, you were there. You probably shared some of those same frustrations. And so when we started this government, I said we need to get a handle on where our money is going, what we're spending it on and put some structure around that. Because for many years, the health authority had a deficit budget, they were allowed to spend money, create programs, hire people without oversight of Cabinet. And despite all the calls we get for, you know, a new arms-length body here or there, it's clear that people want the elected officials to maintain some control and responsibility for these systems. And so this unit was put together so we could get an understanding of what's going on in the healthcare system and where the money is going. The people in the system are busy doing other things. They're busy keeping that system running. And so we needed a way to get that information, and so that's why this unit was created. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member from the Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 1070-20(1):
"HOLD AND SECURE" POLICIES IN
SCHOOLS

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to raise a serious topic here just to ensure that everyone's aware. Just after lunch I was sent a letter from a parent from one of the schools in -- I guess it is public now. It's -- but one of the schools of Yellowknife. And I guess there is now a story up. It's with respect to a hold and secure situation. And I was trying to exercise caution before I brought this up now that it's a public story, Mr. Speaker. So my

questions will be focused to, obviously, the education Minister, noting it's a school.

Mr. Speaker, in essence, the question is really about how do we address these through protocols? Does the department of ECE consider some type of serious incident review after these types of serious incidents happen, and how does it communicate any type of review if it does do these reviews? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, all 49 schools in the Northwest Territories are required to have and maintain safe school and emergency response plans. These plans are reviewed every three years. In between that time, Mr. Speaker, as we know the world quickly changes and so schools themselves can update their plans at any time, can lean on the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to ensure that they've got the support that they need for any updates within that timeframe. But every three years, on a cycle, those plans are also audited on a regular basis. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate finding out what the schools do, but I am more concerned about what ECE does when students bring guns to school, which I am thankful this isn't an incident that we talk about very often. So, Mr. Speaker, specific to the overall issue, is there a protocol to review these types of incidents? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, all of the superintendents, as you can imagine, are in close contact with their principals of schools that would be in question during these incidents, and we have direct linkages between our senior management at ECE and our superintendents.

I just spoke with the superintendent of this incident earlier today, and so I am also in regular contact with our education leaders in the territory. Thank you.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The parent that sent this to me is concerned about the trauma and support for the students, including the staff, by all means. And, lastly, Mr. Speaker, protocol review would identify systemic failures, prevention of data analysis, resource allocation, and certainly back to the

mental health issue, Mr. Speaker. That's the type of issue. Could the Minister look at a protocol review on what happened at this particular incident? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, during incidents like this, it is incredibly important that everyone involved understand exactly what their role is and follow that process. I can report here that everybody followed protocol to a tee following this incident, and in dealing with this incident. That includes contact with the RCMP, that includes making sure that teachers responded how they needed to, that students responded how they needed to. And in this, there is regular contact between the department and the education bodies to ensure that if there is support that is required that they have access to that support, and we continue to maintain contact with our education bodies throughout incidents but also throughout the year as well. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Colleagues, our time is up for oral questions. Oral questions. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Tabling of documents. Minister of Finance.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 471-20(1):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES RESPONSE TO COMMITTEE
REPORT 25-20(1): REPORT ON THE
REVIEW OF BILL 26: AN ACT TO AMEND
THE PUBLIC SERVICE ACT

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to table some documents today. Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the following document: The Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 25-20(1), Report on the Review of Bill 26, An Act to Amend the Public Service Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. Tabling of documents. Member from the Sahtu.

TABLED DOCUMENT 472-20(1):
SECURING CANADA'S LINK TO THE
ARCTIC – THE NATIONAL DEFENCE AND
SECURITY BENEFITS OF THE MACKENZIE
VALLEY HIGHWAY PROJECT

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table a document titled Securing Canada's Link to the Arctic - The National Defence and Security Benefits of the Mackenzie Valley Highway Project. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Motions. Member from Yellowknife North.

Motions

MOTION 66-20(1):
EXTENDED ADJOURNMENT OF THE
HOUSE TO FEBRUARY 24, 2026,
CARRIED

MS. MORGAN: Mr. Speaker, I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Thebacha, that notwithstanding Rule 2.1, when the House adjourns on Tuesday, February 17th, 2026, it shall be adjourned until Tuesday, February 24th, 2026;

AND FURTHER, that any time prior to February 24th, 2026, if the Speaker is satisfied after consultation with the Executive Council and Members of the Legislative Assembly that the public interest requires that the House should meet at an earlier or later time during the adjournment, the Speaker may give notice;

AND THEREUPON, the House shall meet at the time stated in such notice and shall transact its business as it has been duly adjourned to that time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? All those abstaining? Motion passed.

---Carried

Motions. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Mr. Premier.

First Reading of Bills

BILL 42:
TLEGO'HLI GOT'INE FINAL
SELF-GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT ACT,
DEEM READ

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I wish to present to the House Bill 42, Tlego'hli Got'ine

Final Self-Government Agreement Act, to be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Pursuant to Rule 8.2(3), Bill 42 is deemed to have first reading and is ready for second reading. First reading of bills. Minister of Finance.

BILL 43:
SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT
(INFRASTRUCTURE EXPENDITURES), NO.
3, 2025-2026,
DEEM READ

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I wish to present to the House Bill 43, Supplementary Appropriation Act (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 3, 2025-2026, to be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. First reading of bills. Oh sorry, thank you, Minister. Pursuant to Rule 8.2(3), Bill 43 is deemed to have first reading and is ready for second reading. First reading of bills. Minister of Finance.

BILL 44:
SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT
(OPERATIONS, EXPENDITURES AND
BORROWING AUTHORIZATION), NO. 3,
2025-2026,
DEEM READ

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to present to the House Bill 44, Supplementary Appropriation Act (Operations, Expenditures and Borrowing Authorization), No. 3, 2025-2026, to be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. Pursuant to Rule 8.2(3), Bill 44 is deemed to have first reading and is ready for second reading.

First reading of bills. Second reading of Bills. Minister of Finance.

Second Reading of Bills

BILL 43:
SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT
(INFRASTRUCTURE EXPENDITURES), NO.
3, 2025-2026,
CARRIED

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Kam Lake, that Bill 43, Supplementary Appropriation Act

(Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 3, 2025-2026, be read for the second time.

This bill makes supplementary appropriations for infrastructure expenditures of the Government of the Northwest Territories for the 2025-2026 fiscal year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. The motion is in order. To the principle of the bill.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? All those abstaining? The motion is carried.

---Carried

Second reading of Bills. Minister of Finance.

BILL 44:
SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT
(OPERATIONS, EXPENDITURES AND
BORROWING AUTHORIZATION), NO. 3,
2025-2026,
CARRIED

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes, that Bill 44, Supplementary Appropriations Act (Operations Expenditures and Borrowing Authorization), No. 3, 2025-2026, be read for the second time.

This bill makes supplementary appropriations for operations expenditures and borrowing authorization for the Government of the Northwest Territories for the 2025-2026 fiscal year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. The motion is in order. To the principle of the bill.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? All those abstaining? Motion has passed.

---Carried

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): I now call the Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of committee? I am going to 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): Thank you. Committee, will take a 20-minute break. 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 resume our consideration of 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: Yes, please, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

Would the Minister please introduce her witnesses.

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

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Committee, we will resume consideration of the education, key activity, beginning on page 42 with information items on pages 44 to 46. Are there any questions? I will continue on, I don't see any. No further questions, please turn to page 43.

Sorry, I will just back up here. I am going to go to the Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay. Yes, thank you. Yesterday Minister said mental health workers are all in school, so I just wanted to ask the Minister. They make -- who -- is this

funded by ECE only and/or through health and social services? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So 55 percent of the school-based mental health and wellness program is funded by ECE, and 45 percent of it is funded by health and social services. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. These are mental health workers. We know that it's really greatly needed. And at one time, we had a lot of mental health workers. And I know some of them took courses to get into that field, and especially in small communities. And it's kind of sad because when we were still there, there was a lot of good mental health workers, community mental health workers where some of them took early retirement because they were laying off people due to education level. They were looking for people with Master's in mental health. They were looking for doctors. And since that time, did the qualification change for these mental health workers?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So the counsellors that health and social services hires typically are people with a Master's degree, and then the funding through education, culture and employment gives education bodies a lot more flexibility into what they use the funding for as long as there is a prevention aspect to it but allows them to use the funding, for example, for additional clinicians, for personal support workers, for community support workers. And so it allows them the flexibility to determine how they want to use the funding to address the mental health needs of their specific education body and their students in their schools. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. I know it -- you know, I understand about the level of education but at that time, there was a lot of the mental health workers that were in the school. A lot of young people identify with them, or both, vice versa. So it worked at that time. And I just wanted to ask the Minister, since that time is there any improvements? 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, through the reports of the business plan, we know that there are hundreds of contacts between mental health workers that are funded through this program and students, and so I would say that any time a student has access to the support that they deem that they need, it would be certainly a success to ensure that we're supporting students when and where they need it. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you for that information. Another one too is a modernization of Education Act. We haven't heard anything about this, modernizing the Education Act. Is there a report, or can the Minister update us on it and where it's at? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I will go to the Minister. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, this work continues, and I'd like to pass to the deputy minister to provide the granular detail on that. Thank you.

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

MR. JAMIE FULFORD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Work is continuing on Education Act modernization. There is a working group that's been struck under the Council of Leaders structure that has participation from those Indigenous governments who decide they wish to participate. So that work is continuing. The timeframe for that work is considerable because it involves a collaborative effort so it's working with education bodies, Indigenous governments, and others because it's -- you know, it involves a fundamental reconception of the Education Act of the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Okay, the Aurora College budget from last fiscal year to this current fiscal year kind of went down a bit, and it's probably related to the CLC and the closure of the CLC in many of the small communities. So I know that -- well, we've been talking about a lot of other programs before. And with the mine closing, you know, the only secure job that's going to be available in many of the small communities is a government job like social services, health and social services, and teachers and, you know, the people that are employed by the GNWT. That are going to be the only secure jobs that's going to be available in many of the small communities. So

I just wanted to ask the Minister if there is any plan in place for more community-based training or program delivered in small communities. I -- you know, like, I mean, I don't see it anywhere in the report -- not in this report but in a college one too as well regarding teacher education program and social work program if it's going to be coming back or not. Many other young -- our people took those programs, and they're teachers. Some of them are retired now. So I just wanted to ask the Minister if there's going to -- if there is any plan in place to offer more community-based training in small communities. 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, it is in the planning cycle of Aurora College to bring back the Bachelor of Education as well as the social work program to Aurora College in the fall of 2027. They rolled out their general education degree last fall in order to -- where people start with the general education and then in year 3 and 4 have the opportunity to choose either one of the other programs to transition into. So the work that they're doing right now with the college is they're able to specialize in one of those programs when it becomes available. And the intention of Aurora College is to make sure that they are supporting students to do kind of a blended or a hybrid model where they want to be able to have students across the territory access these programs online as well, or a portion of them, depending on if there's a practical component or not as well. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay. So when this happened in 2027, so where -- so how -- which campuses are going to be offering these programs? There's Fort Smith, and there's Yellowknife. In Fort Smith, I know there's a lot of accommodation to accommodate. They have the facility. But in Yellowknife, there's limited accommodation so -- and I strongly believe students should be given a choice, and I do believe in the community-based training. So will some of these communities be delivering, or will they be reaching out to the communities to deliver -- do a community-based training, especially for teacher education program and for social work program? 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 don't have that

level of detail yet or those decisions from the Aurora College board of governors, but as soon as that information is shared with me, I'd be more than happy when appropriate to share it with Members of AOC as well. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Well, it will be beneficial for many of our community members that don't want to leave the communities, especially with their young families. And where housing is -- we're in housing crisis in small communities, and I don't think they want to leave, you know, especially with the public housing unit.

So another one too is a literacy funding. Indigenous languages -- no, literacy funding. I do appreciate my colleagues that are really advocating for the Indigenous, that literacy -- advocating for the Indigenous students, especially with the literacy. So how -- there is an increase from the last fiscal year to the upcoming fiscal year. So how is this funding going to be allocated in the region? 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'd like to pass this one to the deputy minister.

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

MR. JAMIE FULFORD: Mr. Chair, the Member correctly noted that some money was held back from Aurora College under an MOU that we used to provide funding for them, and ECE has reconceived how its role in delivering literacy programming. Some of that funding is being used to support a literacy council employment training program, which is already underway. There's nine community deliveries that are to be completed over an 18-month period. The first four deliveries to take place in Hay River, Fort Resolution, Lutselk'e, and Fort Providence. And there's other efforts, including expressions of interest for services in Inuvik, Fort Smith, to gauge the appetite to re-establish some literacy programming in those communities. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): All right, thank you. I want to continue moving on. Is there any further questions?

I am going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wanted to actually follow up on some questions I was asking on the floor today just with the benefit of the time that we have in Committee of the Whole here, to speak a bit more about the post-secondary funding formula. My colleague from Range Lake was speaking to it yesterday.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: I would like to pass to the deputy minister.

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

MR. JAMIE FULFORD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The funding formula is one of a series of steps that'll need to be put in place as part of transformation. We have to focus our efforts where the need is greatest right now. So we have a general sense of what we want the formula to be able to do, provide dependable, stable funding. And I've, you know, heard the discussion earlier today about having the ability in that to provide for accountability measures as well. That's definitely a part of it as well. But it's -- these are pieces that are in the research phase, I would say, right now. So there's concurrent work going on, but we're not running out ahead with the formula. I don't want to give that misimpression. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): All right. Thank you. I am going to go back to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I guess that raises for me the natural question, what is the department putting ahead of the formula? And I get the impression that's the Polytechnic University Act, but I don't want to answer the questions for them, but can the department kind of help us understand this -- all the steps that are in place, but what's going ahead of the formula? Thanks.

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

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

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

MR. JAMIE FULFORD: Mr. Chair, there's a series of steps. There's milestones that are set out in the Aurora College transformation on the website of the department. And our capacity requires that we focus on areas where we can -- you know, where we need to get something done on a timeline. So I am not sure

that I am quite getting at the Member's question there.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The deputy minister was 90 percent there. What I was looking for is details on exactly what they are working on currently. So he was saying there's a number of steps that need to be done. I am trying to better understand what those steps are and the department's progress on them just so I can have a better sense of where we're at with the transition. So I was just looking for you to elaborate on those points. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay. I will go back to the deputy minister.

MR. JAMIE FULFORD: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the clarification from the Member. So among the steps that we're working on right now, we work closely with Aurora College, have frequent meetings with them. We're supporting them where we can when it comes to their CAQC involvement. There is discussion on infrastructure needs. We're in discussions with them on future course offerings and the timing of those offerings. So there is a lot of discussion happening with Aurora College on a number of fronts at this time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I know that a while back it was highlighted that we had fallen off the timeline. I went back, and I looked at the foundational review, and I've kind of looked over it, and I note that we're not terribly off of step. The foundation -- foundational review envisioned the university being fully realized by 2028. So we still have some time. I am just wondering where we're at in the timeline knowing that the CAQC process has been pretty positive. Can the Minister or deputy minister help us understand where we're at in terms of timelines and whether they feel that we're on track. And if we're not on track, just to give them some more to elaborate on what we need to do to get on track. 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, in the back of the Aurora College mandate agreement, there's an implementation plan that has dates associated with it, and we are on track according to that plan. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. I will have to look through that mandate agreement again. I have scanned through it in the past but will look again. I think that's all my questions for this page for now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): For page 42, 44, and 46, are there any further questions?

I'll go to the Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: With the literacy funding, you know, it's in the GNWT stats and then so we've -- there is -- it was also identified in the auditor general report about the low education level in many of our small communities, and Tlicho was one of them that was mentioned. So, you know, I am just surprised that at this time with a study with that initiative that they're doing nine other communities were mentioned. But I just wanted to ask if Tlicho is going to be part of -- or in the upcoming, will be part of the -- will be part of this funding, the literacy funding that they're rolling out. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So if the Member is referring to the employability training for the literacy council funding that is rolling out right now through literacy council, the first four community deliveries will happen in Hay River, Fort Resolution, Lutselk'e, and Fort Providence. Those are the first four communities that are being targeted. And then from there, of course, Mr. Speaker, there's additional literacy funding from the Department of Education, Culture and Employment that operates on an application basis, and that funding goes to other communities as well. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay. Application basis. So who does apply? Like, is it the Indigenous government and/or is it education council or education authority? 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, it can be everyone from groups within the community. It can be through different organizations. And so there's a multitude of people that can apply for this funding. And I'd be happy to provide the

Member with a list of funding that has gone to Tlicho communities specifically in the past -- or last year, if the Member would like. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, thank you. Thank you for the information. The JK to grade 12 student services, I think my colleagues, they probably talked about this already, and then there's -- is that related to the JP program?

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Can the Member please repeat the question. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Oh, sorry. Okay, JK to grade 12 student services, the revised estimate is \$23 million compared to the upcoming fiscal year, \$8 million. This 23, is that a reflection of the JP program? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So I suppose the answer would be yes and no in that Jordan's Principle funding does not show up in the Government of the Northwest Territories' main estimates but what is captured there is the support assistant initiative that was introduced. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Well, I am kind of worried because, you know, JP program, a lot of small communities -- even in Yellowknife school, they really benefited from the program, you know, working with our Indigenous students. And it's a good program so I just wanted to know -- and my colleagues have always said it that education is our treaty rights and why we -- you know, like JP program, if it's gonna -- you know, whether it happens or not to -- for many of the school. I just wanted to know why we did not put the same effort that we did in 2025-2026 revised estimate in the upcoming fiscal year. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So the previous iteration of the support assistant initiative was brought forward mid-year in a supplementary appropriation.

We're in the process right now of working with education bodies to understand how the follow-up school year may differ from the previous. As we've noted, there was multi-year funding agreements as well. And so next year will look different than the previous year. In addition, Mr. Chair, I am currently in conversations with education bodies to also learn how the support assistant initiative rolled out across the Northwest Territories and to better understand more of the granular detail about what worked and what didn't. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. We shouldn't have to be going through supplementary budget. It should be part of the main estimates, knowing that this is a very important program. You know, we know why JP program exists. And for so long, our students have been at disadvantage. So I just want -- that's the reason why I am asking is that why -- like, it's not part of it. And I think from here on -- I hope that the ECE department will put this in their main estimates knowing that things are changing in many of the small communities. There's many of our -- are undiagnosed and, you know, we need more workers to be working with our young people so to be at that same level. We're not going to meet larger regional centre level but at least help our young people to go up a bit with their education level. And I think it's because we're lacking a lot of services. We're underfunded already, and this department will really help our young people. And it creates jobs too now that we're going to have -- if this thing is not approved, what's going to happen to many of our workers? You know, because they're already -- especially in the small communities, I am worried about many of our small communities where many of our young people with challenges when -- under the radar, you know. Like, I mean, they were not -- they were at the disadvantage, and it's going to really hold them back more now. So I just wanted to ask that, you know, we shouldn't have to be waiting for the supplementary budget. It should always be part of the main estimate. So that's just more of my comment. But, you know, it's something that we're going to be looking at all the time.

So another one too is that post-secondary education. Post-secondary education funding, it's the same all the way. It's \$40 million. So that \$40 million, I know a big chunk of that probably go to Aurora College, College Nordique. What's the other -- Dechinta. So, you know, I just wanted to ask the Minister -- I know I keep talking about the community-based training. We need more community-based programs offered in many of the small communities. So

for the -- you can do the revised too, you know -- like, I mean, we are always doing supplementary and revised estimate anyway so -- and it's not too late for the upcoming year. So I just wanted to ask the Minister if they're -- if they've been working with Indigenous government or other groups to deliver more community-based programs so that -- so some of our young people or families that don't want to leave their communities right away can be accommodated. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So in regards to the question just asked by the Member and around community-based training programs, one of the things that we've been working to do is more on-the-job training formats and so working with employers through our suite of workforce development programs where training can be afforded through funding directly to an employer. And so that means that an employer can be supporting to either send a staff member for that training, work within the community to bring training opportunities to the individual. And so -- and what that means is that the person is working for an employment opportunity that already exists. And so that's been where our focus has been.

In addition to that, Mr. Chair, it was certainly working within the Northwest Territories to grow accreditation. So this past year, ECE has accredited one new institution and 11 new programs to be able to offer to NWT residents. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I am going to -- just got to swap out for a minute here. But before I do that, I want to just move on because yesterday we had -- on this section here, we had about eight Members speak, so I am just going to continue on. So I am going to ask Members to go to page 43.

Education, Culture and Employment, education, \$262,220,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I am going to ask my colleague from the Sahtu to step in for about five minutes. So I will come right back.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, colleagues. Moving on to income security, beginning on page 47 with information items on pages 49 and 50. Are there any questions?

To the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Let me just get signed back into my computer here.

I wanted to ask about student financial assistance in relation to a few things. One is the number of students receiving SFA funding for health-related post-secondary and graduate studies increased a little bit from 2023 to 2024-2025 by about ten students. What steps has the department taken to further increase the number of Indigenous and local residents pursuing health and social services careers through SFA? That's my first question.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, by working with our career and education advisors, we certainly make sure that students know what jobs are available to them, what jobs are in need in the Northwest Territories. Also, certainly, especially when it comes to health care, that's something that Northerners hear a lot about. But we, from a student financial assistance perspective, support all of the post-secondary desires of students as far as them choosing ultimately what they want to do and making sure that they're connected or supported to understand how GNWT programs can support them in that endeavour. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Minister. To the Member.

MR. MORSE: Frame Lake. Thanks, Mr. Chair. All the chairs get the lakes mixed up. It's easy to do.

The -- what I wanted to start to get at with the Minister here is just whether we could be considering changing the way SFA programming is done to better align with some of the goals we have. For example, we are working on health recruitment. We want to be growing the number of homegrown doctors, nurses. And so has the Minister considered, or I guess Cabinet considered, whether we could use programs in SFA to do that. So, for example a couple of years ago, it was -- the program was rolled back. I can't remember the name of the program off the top of my head, but it was the program that gave additional grants to anybody who came into the territory for their student loans. And we rolled that program back. It was considered too expensive. But I am wondering should we be bringing programs like that specifically for health professionals? So as a recruitment tool, as something to help boost people coming into the territory to help say to people hey, if you're coming here as a nurse, we'll help pay for your school if you're willing to

come here and work. Have we thought about using SFA in that kind of way.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): To the Member. To the Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, certainly that is something that has been tried in the past and ultimately has been found that if, you know, certain jobs want to be incentivized by a certain department, that the department offer, for example, different scholarships which has been done throughout the government. But from a student financial assistance perspective, we have a number of jobs in the Northwest Territories that are in demand. Trades, for example. You know, environmental technicians as we move toward more major projects. And so really, you know, in the example of education, culture and employment, we have an early childhood educator scholarship that we offer. And so, really, the way that we've gone about it is by focusing on that from a department perspective rather than at the root, which is the student financial assistance funding mechanism. Because at the end of the day, from that perspective we want to ensure that we're supporting the goals of the student of where they want to work and how they want to add to our communities. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And for the sake of time, I am not going to belabour the point too hard, but I do think that it could be a powerful recruitment tool. I think people who are coming to the territory really appreciated that the territorial government was willing to cover some of the costs of their education. And I just think when we're thinking about key professions that we desperately need more of in the NWT, I think that could be a solid recruitment tool. So I will save that point for a Member's statement.

But I wanted to turn to another point, and that is improving Indigenous outcomes. It's something that I ask about every year when we're in COW with the Minister of education. And, again, talking about the SFA program, is this something that the Minister has thought about in terms of -- I know that we have different criteria for SFA for Indigenous students. So where I want to get at is I had a constituent who I came to the Minister with a while back who is trying to enrol in a bridging program to get themselves into university, and SFA doesn't currently cover that. And it seemed like a gap to me in the sense that we are trying to encourage Indigenous students to get into post-secondary and yet we're not supporting them in doing the

kind of programming that would help literally bridge them into post-secondary school.

So I am wondering if the Minister has ever considered changing the rules of SFA specifically for Indigenous students to help cover bridging programs, that would help them get into post-secondary school, to help us change those education outcomes which are so different for Indigenous students versus non-Indigenous in the territory. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So Mr. Chair, with the changes to student financial assistance that were introduced, we have seen an increase in Indigenous students pursuing post-secondary. We currently have about 50 percent of student financial assistance students in the Northwest Territories are Indigenous students. And the big change that was made there was making sure that Indigenous students have access to an unlimited amount of semesters and that includes, for example, the tuition and the books that come through the basic grant. And in addition to that, Mr. Chair, we, through our education funding, also have magnet facilities that are growing in popularity in communities in both Yellowknife and communities outside of Yellowknife. And magnet facilities are a way for students to make sure that they can access the coursework that they might need to pursue courses within a post-secondary program. So if it's, you know, for example improving a grade in English or math or chemistry, that they have access to that programming with a dedicated teacher. And so that is one way that we have pursued making courses available that students might need for a certain post-secondary program.

In addition to that, we have the northern distance learning which also provides access to specialized courses that students might need for post-secondary. And we have a pretty strong completion rate for those courses. I believe it's almost 70 percent across the territory. So we're seeing that students are seeing a lot of success by accessing these higher level courses through northern distance learning as well. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I do appreciate the Minister's answers here and will look more into those programs and perhaps seek a bit more information from her about them. But back to the point, I am -- you know, considering that we've already taken the step of

giving our Indigenous students unlimited semesters, I mean, would it really make so much of a difference to change policy to allow those students to access some of their SFA funding for bridging programming just knowing that we are -- yeah, I think I already made the case. I think the case can be made again. I can save that for a Member's statement. But just knowing that we are trying to level the playing field here -- the playing field is not currently level -- would the Minister consider looking into changing policy to allow them to access funding for bridging programs knowing that it is getting them -- pushing them in the direction of getting into university programming? And if that's all that's standing in the way, I don't want us to be a barrier. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, that would require some legislative change for sure, to look into something like that. Within that, Mr. Chair, we would want to ensure that at the end of the day that students were pursuing a certification or diploma or degree program, and we would also need to weigh that against other financial priorities given that there is access to improving grades and accessing these courses within the Northwest Territories. And so it would require additional funding for students to be able to access these type of programs outside the Northwest Territories. And so within, you know, fiscal constraints, we would need to decide if we wanted to also broaden that to access outside the territory when it already is somewhat accessible in the territory through magnet facilities or other options. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. The time's up for the Member from Frame Lake. Would you like to go back on the list? Good? Okay, we'll add him to the list.

Okay, moving on to the Member from the Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. With the anticipated -- looking at productive choices being brought into the income support assistance program, are there any anticipated budget changes that will be -- that you foresee in the near future? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, through conversations and -- through conversations with Members, it has become quite apparent that there is a desire to see some form of productive choices returned to the income

security programming. So that is currently something that we are pursuing and working on collaboratively with Members. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Minister. To the Member of Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A couple of years or last year I asked research -- to do some research on the percentage of recipients on income support. And the NWT as a whole was at 7 percent and the Mackenzie Delta's three communities were at 15 percent, and it's the highest in the NWT. I don't know -- with no productive choices being in play right now, and I don't know how the system works if they go there. Like, all the recipients go there at the end of the month, or is that how it works, or do they go there throughout the whole month? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, within a few days of the end of the month, residents can contact a -- or any time after the 25th of each month, residents can reach out to their client navigator to work on their paperwork for the following month because the income assistance program is meant to be a month-to-month program to help residents meet their basic needs, so for example their rent, utilities, etcetera. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. To the Member, Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: But we have a full-time worker in each of the communities throughout the whole month. Is that correct? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we have a client navigator that is responsible for each of the communities. So some communities do not have their own dedicated client navigator, but each community would still have access to a client navigator that serves their community. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. To the Member, Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. For clarification, is the client navigator working throughout the whole month? If -- I don't see -- I don't understand if the clients are just going to the client navigator's office any time after the

25th of each month to do their paperwork, and what's -- what are they doing? Are they in the office throughout the whole duration of the whole month? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So client navigators do work all year round for the entirety of the month and are quite busy serving Northerners throughout the month. While some people are on, you know, a more routine of coming in, there's often people who come in midway through a month to receive supports from the government based on what their employment is like, what their needs are like. And so these people are incredibly busy all year round. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. To the Member, Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. How will this change the scope of the community or the navigator who delivers the income assistance program in terms of productive choices working with the Indigenous governments, or will it be contracted out? I don't -- I mean, I am all in favour of productive choices but, like you stated, the logistics of it has -- still has to be worked out. But, you know, I am curious to see how the -- how this will impact or change the scope of the navigator's work plan throughout the month. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, it's important to note that our client navigators do not have a social work background, that they are already very busy in their current roles working to understand the finances of Northerners and to ensure that they are being responsive to the financial need of Northerners. Before, when Productive Choices was used by education, culture and employment, it was incredibly administratively burdensome and so understanding the workload that already exists for client navigators, we need to make sure that whatever program that we bring into play for the North is -- you know, works for the scope of practice of client navigators and can also be supported within each community as well. So that is work that is yet to be worked out and figured out. But the scope of practice of client navigators and the time that they have and making sure that they can still support the needs of residents using the program is certainly top of mind. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. To the Member from Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's all I have. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member. Any further questions? To the Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do support -- you know, I mean, right now with the mine closures so we don't really know -- like, many of the -- the agreement that's in place with -- from the -- between the Indigenous and the mining companies, the impact benefits agreement, many of the small communities or Indigenous government did benefit from that agreement in place because SFA does not fund the bridging program. And just like my colleague said -- and I really do appreciate him talking on that -- the bridging program, due to the -- you know, due to the education outcome, many of our students they go through the upgrading program.

So with the SFA, is that -- if our students go through the Aurora College bridging program, the OCAP and UCAP that's in place, but it does not fund ABE program, so then our students will be funded, then -- you know, that are taking programs through the Aurora College. But students who -- you know, we should respect their choices of where they want to go. And students who wants to go south -- because some of them have never been or lived outside of their community, so it's the experience that they're looking for too, and this is a good time for them too as well because the two different level educations. They're coming from the low to the high so there is, you know -- I do support them because it's good that, you know, that they learn from both areas, and the bridging program is more like an upgrading program. So as a result because of that, you know, because of SFA does not fund that, many of the Indigenous government, they do fund the students that want to take the bridging program. But with the mine closure, we're not too sure if that funding is going to be there no more. And I do support, you know -- I do support -- I hope that the SFA or ECE will change their policy to support the bridging program for students who wants to take -- to go south. We should have respect -- we should respect their choices of where they want to go. It shouldn't be just only selective few. So I will say the same too is there -- does the ECE have any plan in place to change their policy to accommodate the students who wants to take the bridging program in southern Canada? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the upgrading through Aurora College is currently free to students and so that's where we have invested in that. In addition, through the feds, they do have funding for a university college entrance preparation program. And at this time, that is how we have invested in as to make sure that it is accessible to students as a midway point, and so certainly if we -- there'd be a significant policy change and an additional funding mechanism if we're then funding this outside the territory as well.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, thank you. Can the Minister explain? Because I think she said it's free to students. How is it? If she can explain that, I will -- you know, then I will let our young people know that it is free to take the upgrading program or the bridging program, but OCAP and UCAP is a bridging program. You know that, and I know that. So how is it free? Because the students have to pay for their tuition, their books, and everything. So if she can explain that, I would really appreciate that. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the OCAP and UCAP are approved under the SFA regulations as there is a post-secondary component to it, and those are offered through Aurora College. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Well, they are the bridging program so why not just offer or extend it for the students who wants to go south? Why just only limited to take to attend Aurora College in the Northwest Territories. You know, there are some families that are not like -- where they can send their kids south to go to school or live with families or live down south because, you know, their kids can take hockey or attend or play hockey. We don't have that luxury. So that's -- the bridging program is the only options. I don't have families that are in my ridings that will fund or send their kids to Edmonton so that the child can play hockey and at the same time receive the best education. So that's why I am saying that, you know, the bridging program should be offered to other students, should be funded by the student finance assistance program. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, as a government, we've spent a lot of time talking about the funding that's going to Aurora College. This further supports that, and it's something that we are already in -- heavily investing in as a government. And in addition to that, the programs lead to further education as well within Aurora College and so act as kind of a laddering program within Aurora College to their nursing program, their business administration, and then in the future their social worker program and their education program as well, so continuing to work to invest in those much-needed careers in the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker -- Mr. Chair. I don't mean to discredit the students because I know there's a lot of young people from my region that are taking business administration program and they're taking the nursing programs. I really do appreciate, you know, they're making every effort so that they don't be -- you know, so that they don't depend on the system to survive. And I really do appreciate their choice. But I am just asking that to fund the bridging program -- you know, like, it shouldn't be only -- the bridging program should not be only to the Aurora College should take the OCAP program. That's what I am saying. It's just that they should just freely fund the bridging program for students that wants to go outside of the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I certainly hear the Member on this one. It becomes a question of where we, at the end of the day, want to be able to put added dollars and invest. I am working very hard right now to make sure that we're investing more in our JK to 12 education system, especially with the review on inclusive schooling. And if we are to increase funding to a program or programs outside of the Northwest Territories, we are faced with the decision of either finding more dollars from somewhere, and that can be quite a challenge right now. I am trying to funnel those as best as possible into our JK to 12 system so that, you know, down the road we have more graduates from programs that are ready for post-secondary, or it becomes a matter of continuing to remove dollars from Aurora

College, which could, in turn, reduce the level of programming that they're able to offer if we are kind of spreading that out. And so there's challenging decisions, of course, to be made, and right now my focus really is on making sure that we're putting as many more dollars as possible into the JK to 12 system. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Minister. To the -- I will allow one more to the Member.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay. Well, the funding for the SFA is not enough, you know, like, for single students where many of our young people they leave. From my communities or from my regions, they're young, single, no dependent, and they're living on \$850 a month. I just want to ask the Minister if -- is there a plan in place where they're going to improve or increase the student financial assistance program for students that are -- you know, for the independent -- single students, I mean, \$850 to increase that. Even for the family as well because family that goes -- that leave the community to go to school, it's a big -- it's a -- it affects them culturally. It's a cultural shock for them because they go from living on unlimited income to fixed income. So I just want to ask if there's a plan in place to increase the student financial assistance program. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the numbers used by the Member were numbers that were in play when I was a university student. The numbers today are -- for a single person is \$1,000 a month. With a spouse is \$1,400 a month. With one dependent is \$1,700 a month. Two dependents is \$1,950 a month. And three dependents is \$2,200 a month. And in addition to that, students can also elect to have a repayable loan portion as well. That's another \$1,400 a month on top of that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Minister. We will move on to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My first question is around targets in the business plan. On page 13 of the business plan, there is the overall goal or action to increase the number of employed income assistance clients. And we've spoken a lot about that amongst ourselves and in this House about the importance of trying to encourage people to seek out employment wherever they can. And so the goal was to increase clients by 10 percent over the course of this Assembly. The baseline that was

identified from 2023-2024 was 934 but actually, as of May last year, that number has declined. We're down to 803. The explanation right now that's in the business plan said well, maybe that's because some of the clients are moving over to the income assistance program for seniors and people with disabilities.

Can I get the Minister to clarify what would lead us to believe that, you know, these 131 clients are likely to be seniors or people with disabilities that are actually employed in this context and on income assistance? To me, that seems like a stretch because those seem like categories of people who would face the most challenges and be least likely to be employed, but I wonder if the Minister can comment on their rationale there or any further reasons they see as to why we're seeing a decrease in the number of employed people on income assistance. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, it also includes earned income. This includes honorariums. We have a lot of elders and seniors in the Northwest Territories that participate on boards using their years of experience, and so this is something that seniors and elders would be accounted for within that section as well. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. And thanks to the Minister for that rationale.

So how do you define employed, then? It talks about the use of earned income exemptions. Is there like a minimum? If someone gets one honorarium in a year, are they employed, or what is sort of the minimum amount of income that you would consider someone to actually be employed? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. So there is no minimum. It is somebody who receives dollars for work that is paid work. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thanks, Minister. To the Member, Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So my recommendation, if anyone's asking, for this target in the business plan, for it to be like a useful measure of people seeking and gaining employment, I think there should be some sort

of minimum threshold for what someone is earning in a month or in a year or on average for them to be considered employed. To me, it's not that useful to say well, we're trying to increase the number of people with employment but that could include someone who got 100 bucks one day, and that's it, and so now they're considered employed for the year. I think most of us, that would be too much of a stretch for the imagination to really fulfill the goals that we're setting out for ourselves in the Assembly. So my two cents there.

I had another question related to the senior home heating subsidy. And the Minister might not have this offhand. But a number of my constituents do not live within a municipal boundary. They're living rurally. So in my case, out on the Ingraham Trail. And I know there have been barriers for many of those people accessing many programs that the GNWT has to offer just because they're not within any municipality. So for this senior home heating subsidy, are folks who are seniors eligible for that if they live outside a municipal boundary? Say they live rurally somewhere in the NWT. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, in short, yes. And if they own their own property, seniors qualify. In addition, you know, Mr. Speaker, an example of that for the Members riding would be Prelude Lake. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you for that clarification from the Minister. That's all my questions on this one. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member. We will move on to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I also have a couple questions on the business plan on income security. So the business plan notes that the updates for the new income assistance for seniors and persons with disabilities that you have the option to apply to the original stream or the new stream which allows people to apply to whatever program best aligns with what they need. Can the Minister clarify how many people have switched streams? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I couldn't say how many people offhand would qualify for one that switched to the other. I'd have to go into it and see how many people are on income assistance for adults that are also a senior, which is information, if the Member wanted, that we could gather. Essentially, there are some people who don't want to sign up for the program for an entire year and are looking for just, you know, coverage for a month here or in a month there. Maybe they have seasonal work, or maybe there is, you know, a month where there are added expenses that are coming in and, you know, we have a lot of instances in the territory where people have fluctuating seasonal income. And so it's in order to address that and make sure that they're receiving the support that they need in the way that they need it. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Yeah, I would love -- thank you, Mr. Chair. I would love to have a little bit more information if the Minister and her department is willing to share. I think it would be interesting to have that data to track the efficacy of having the two streams and understanding where things are best -- the best fit is for residents.

I guess also I would like to clarify in the same sort of category of questions around that program is whether ECE has encountered any challenges or confusion around the eligibility of the new program or if applicants have uncertainty about which program is more appropriate or if there is, indeed, like some difficulties for people to make that choice, either with assistance or without. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for the question, but also the clarification. I can confirm for the Member that 69 seniors have accessed income assistance instead of the income assistance for seniors and persons with disabilities, so the number 69. And client navigators work with the clients to walk them through the options and what the difference is between the two programs so that they can have the tools at their disposal to make that decision. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the Minister for that clarification. For an item that's near and dear to my heart,

and I appreciate working with the Minister on that very, very much, can she clarify if there have been new subscribers to income security now that the eligibility criteria has been expanded for folks who are applying for permanent residency on humanitarian or compassionate grounds? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the answer is no, no extra people. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's all for now.

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

I will allow round two. And I have the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, I wanted to turn my questions now to the income assistance program and an area that I started to pull on a little bit earlier this sitting, and that is just the department's work on reforming the ongoing work, I would say, reforming income assistance and how we can better improve this program. In other words, there's been lots of talk about the productive choices, bringing that back. And I just wanted to ask the Minister a little bit more about the work that Alternatives North did with their basic income guarantee proposal. Recognizing that the full proposal may not be something that's on the table for the department right now, I can't help but emphasize yet again the potential savings for the program that the report put forward. When I heard the Minister responding to other Members' questions about the administrative burden that comes with administering income support, that is something that was proposed there and other savings that could come about as a result of changing the way income support was delivered.

So, specifically, I am curious if the Minister or her staff have done any further work on looking at our turndown thresholds and whether those are one of the factors in people who are currently on income support not seeking out or furthering their employment. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'd like to pass to the deputy minister to give the department

perspective as well on this one. I know I've answered questions on the floor of the House, so I will pass to the Deputy.

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

MR. JAMIE FULFORD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The department does from time to time look into -- there's reports on universal basic income that we see every few years. We do, of course, read them, especially when they come from, you know, a northern, you know, think tank, if I can call it that. So we do look at it each time. At this time, we're not considering implementing either a universal basic income or a pilot project. Our preliminary assessment is that it would be too costly to implement. And with something like this, if you do have a pilot program, you're going to have significant additional administrative costs when you're running two different programs. That doesn't mean that we're not looking at the positive attributes of universal basic income, which are low threshold and that piece and some of the changes to our programming last year were aimed at some of those very barriers. So yeah, as I say, we've reviewed the Alternatives' report and they reference the northern basket measure as part of determining positive level -- or poverty levels. We do as well within our system. So there are some common elements. But at this time, we're not -- not considering a move in that direction. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the deputy minister. To the Member, Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I appreciate the deputy minister demonstrating that he's certainly read that report, and I am sure Alternatives North doesn't mind being referred to as a think tank at all.

What I was trying to get at is not so much that I am encouraging the department -- well, I am encouraging the department. But it's okay that the department is not looking at doing UBI right now. What I am trying to get at is that the turndown threshold work that was done I think could help inform our work. It's clear to me -- and I will just say this, from talking to my own constituents, I have a constituent who's on income support, and they have very clearly communicated to me that the turndown threshold that we currently have is too low. And that person is considering not working at all so that they don't -- because every single month, they have to apply for income support. It's unsure whether they're going to get it. They're worried about having clawbacks. And so it's a barrier to them being employed. So I am just

speaking for one person. And I know that I've got colleagues who have many constituents who are in the same boat. So I think it's something worth looking into further.

Maybe what I would ask, to give maybe perhaps a more constructive question, is what work the department is doing on reviewing how income support is being delivered and how we can overcome this fundamental problem in the program that my colleagues have spoken so much to. I am curious to understand. And I think I emphasize -- I have emphasized this behind closed doors, and I will emphasize this on the floor too.

I encourage the department to try things, to experiment. I think that is exactly the kind of attitude that we need to have when we're working on these problems. And, certainly, if I can give my own reassurance, when the department is willing to put themselves out there and try things, I am not going to jump down their throats when mistakes are made. So I would just encourage experiment -- experimentation, trying things, you know, having the courage to be wrong sometimes but also knowing that through doing that, we might find a right way. So a lot of comments there. But looking for a response from the department. Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, you know, what can be done certainly with the changes to the policies within income assistance, there is a public education component that is needed so that we're ensuring that people understand, you know, the portion of earned income certainly with -- within any change, especially when it comes to people reliant on a program for their month-to-month needs, we want to make sure that that they have the information that they need at their fingertips and understand the opportunities that exist within that. Our intent is to make sure that we are supporting Northerners to pursue employment opportunities, get their foot in the door, while still being able to rely on their month-to-month basic needs are met by the program. But I think that's it. It's that this program ultimately, at the end of the day, is to support the basic needs of residents, to ensure that they can pay rent, to ensure that they can pay utilities. And so I encourage the Member not to look at it so much as a clawback in that we're also trying to support residents to find pathways to employment, find pathways to education and training through this program because ultimately -- and I know that I have these conversations with the Member all the time, and

he's a huge proponent of training and post-secondary. That's what helps lift people out of poverty and into opportunity, and so the more that we can support that the better. And so that's why there is that opportunity for increases to earned income so that we're providing that grace period needed. And so certainly not a clawback but making sure that we're working together with residents to meet the basic needs on a month-to-month basis so that residents can be -- can be safe, can, you know, remain housed, can provide meals at the end of the day. And so, really, it's more us working together with residents to meet their month-to-month basic needs to be healthy Northerners. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Minister. At this point in time here, I will add, and on the spirit of leniency going into round two, if Members could condense their comments and a short brief question, that might expedite our review of this chapter.

Going back to the Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To that end, I am finished. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member. I will now move on to the Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you. Mr. Chair, it is a shame, you know, SFA policy is holding our Indigenous students hostage, fund them only when -- you know, if they are taking Aurora College bridging program. But it's something that we need to work on to improve. Yes, there's a lot of improvement made. You know, like student loans was increased from 60 to 90,000, and at the same time and just like the Minister said, okay, the -- for basic and supplementary funds have been, you know -- there was some improvement made. But living in the Northwest Territories, to rent -- the rent are -- you know, there's limited housing for students and -- in Aurora College -- with Aurora College, especially in Yellowknife, we have limited space available. So some students, okay, they go to Fort Smith, and still the funding is still not enough. I mean, it's, I guess -- that's only way that some of our young people will, you know -- it's -- it's going to help with mental and emotional -- the struggle is good in a way sometimes but not, you know, to what it used to be, especially now with the high cost of living. So I know that the some of the students, in order to meet for the rent, especially with the rent increase going on -- and then I know some of the parents or some of the young people do not -- room and board is not an option for them. Maybe -- so they're going to go for student loan.

That's what they're going to do because this -- the monthly living allowance, it's not going to pay for the rent if you're living off campus, so. And then -- so there is a student loan that they offer here. There's that remissible loan but there's that loan that they're offering -- okay, just wait. Okay, the interest rate for the loan is -- it's zero, but for the -- for the Indigenous student, if they want to live off campus because due -- it's -- you know, it's not their fault because there's limited accommodation available for them. So if they do go and then they apply for a loan, so what is the highest loan that the NWT SFA gave to the Indigenous students for taking programs in Yellowknife, especially in Yellowknife, you know, with the high rent. So what's the highest student loan or that loan that they give -- it's not a remissible loan that -- I am not talking about the remissible loan. I am talking about another loan to offset the high cost of living.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the highest loan, so the repayable loan, is the additional \$1,400 a month, and the loan cap overall for students is \$90,000. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: The other -- the \$90,000 you're talking about but that's not available for the Indigenous students? That's for -- that's a remissible. Because we do have SFA already. So do we qualify for that loan as well? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So the loan limit for students incorporates any form of loan that they have. So if they have a remissible loan and a repayable loan, it's all found within that \$90,000 limit. And as they pay it down, it allows them to continue to incur more loan funding under that amount. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: So as Indigenous students, did they use up to the capacity or up to the 90,000? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, the loan limit for

all students is \$90,000. There is an unlimited amount of semesters for Indigenous students, so the semester portion is a grant and then on top of that it's the -- the remissible loan and the repayable loan. As students return to the territory, that remissible loan naturally comes down and as they repay their repayable loan, then the repayable loan portion comes down. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. I know that Indigenous students are not going to use up the \$90,000 loan because we're already getting remissible loan, you know. So we're not -- that doesn't -- we're not eligible for that. But we can get the other loan that we have to pay. A remissible loan doesn't qualify for the Indigenous students. So that's why I am just asking. So if for loan default, I know that if the students skip, they have to pay every dollar that they borrow because of the supplementary grant, basic and supplementary. So if a student get a loan, so they have to pay every dollar that they borrow. It's not like remissible loan where non-Indigenous or non-treaty apply for that loan, half is remiss. And that doesn't apply to the Indigenous students because when I was a student and I have to pay. We have to pay. And there are other students that I talked to said the same thing. Because the money -- the amount of money they were receiving didn't even cover their rent so they had to get an extra loan, and they have to pay all of it back, so. And some of them, if they didn't -- did that, because of the limited jobs and then for whatever reason, like, some of their loan went to the collections and that affected their credit rating. So that is another reason why some of the Indigenous young people said they don't want to go for that loan even though it's there to help them, but because of that they said no. Some of them put off -- put off their education or find other ways to get their training. So it would have been nice if -- if they -- if they could be treated the same as the remissible loan. But they don't qualify for the remissible loan. So that was the only reason why I was asking, and -- but I mean, it's something that, you know, we still have time so there's still room for improvement, so I will be talking about that. It's -- it's not just for now. It's -- it's going to be -- maybe I will do another Member's statement on some of these programs that's in place.

But with income support assistance, and my colleague talked about the productive choice, with the mine closure -- I mean, the income support assistance or income assistance program has remained the same from 2025-2026 with -- you know, in the upcoming

fiscal year too, and with the mine closure, do you think this \$44 million is enough? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we endeavour to make sure that we are seeing more funding flow out of education, culture and employment for workforce development training dollars rather than through income assistance and want to make sure that if we have residents of this territory who want to work and are looking for opportunities that we're working closely with businesses, Indigenous development corporations, and residents themselves to support them, to find opportunities within the territory, and then also even working, for example, with opportunities within Nunavut. So there are other mines operating in Nunavut that are working -- are looking for workers, and making sure that we're making those connections so that ultimately people can stay employed and stay in the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Minister. I will allow one more question there to the Member of Monfwi if you can make it a little bit shorter for the time allowed and to the question on this activity.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Yeah, well, income support assistance program and with the mine closure, this is where the bridging program is really -- like, I mean, SFA needs to change their policy to accommodate many of our people that are employed. They've been out of school for many years some of them, and some of them may not want to go to Aurora College. And I don't think a lot of them don't want to go on the income support assistance because they've been self-sufficient and, you know -- and income support it's not an option for them for a lot of them, you know, because they have -- they have mortgages, they have -- not -- you know, they have other payments. So asking them to go on income support, it's really gonna be -- it's -- they have -- you know, they have pride because they live -- they make -- they work for a living. So that's why the bridging program needs -- the policy needs to change to accommodate people that are coming from the mine industry that have been absent from school for so many years and that -- you know, maybe they want to go south to take some programs and not limited to -- only to the Aurora College OCAP and UCAP. Thank you. It's just more of a comment. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member. Aside from the comment, are

there any further questions? Seeing none, does committee -- okay, no further questions. Please turn to page 48.

Education, Culture and Employment, income security, \$71,099,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, committee. Thank you. Moving on to labour development and standards on page 51, with information items on 53 to 55. Are there any questions?

To the Member, Great Slave and Yellowknife North.

MS. REID: Okay, that makes it sound like we're gonna do battle, Mr. Chair, but I will go first.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): (audio) Yellowknife North. Proceed.

MS. REID: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. So just looking at the main estimates for this activity, there -- there doesn't mean to be any -- there doesn't appear to be any substantial growth or reduction. It's staying sort of static. And so with the I would say rather continuous pressing of many members on the desire and need to see more tradespeople in -- being trained in the -- in the NWT, having more opportunities for apprenticeship, etcetera, how does the Minister and this division see itself effectively supporting labour market training and development efforts. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we have recently signed an agreement with the federal government to increase our funding to this area. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And apologies if I missed that in -- in previous deliberations of Committee of the Whole. So thank you to the Minister for that. Can she provide more details around that agreement? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we're always happy to get more money from the federal government. So it is an agreement with the federal government. The Member has not

missed anything in Committee of the Whole. This is the first I've been asked about it, so the first I've been able to talk about it. Because we don't have the dollars in hand, I am advised that I should be a little bit vague on the number but it would come forward in supplementary appropriation to this House, and I look forward to sharing more details, hopefully sooner than later, with Members of the House and residents of this territory. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Well gosh, Mr. Chair. I don't have anything further to press. Look forward to that detail. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can the Minister first just clarify in terms of the loss of two active positions, I guess one in headquarters and one in the North Slave, what were those positions doing -- I am not sure if it's related at all to the possible new federal agreements or what's coming. But maybe you could just explain what those positions were that have been lost or sunsetted. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, we had a sunset of an agreement, a federal agreement, that was funding the North Slave regional training partnership position. And then in addition, we have removed a certification administrator position that has been vacant for more than 20 months. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so just to clarify, was the North Slave regional training partnership specific to the Giant Mine remediation project? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The answer is yes.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So that brings me to some targets in the business plan specifically around the Giant Mine remediation

project and the socio-economic goals or indicators.

You know, this has been there for a number of years and publicly available that the Giant Mine remediation project is targeting 25 to 35 percent Indigenous employment, 36 percent northern employment, 30 percent female employment, and yet we see in the business plan progress to date has been very disappointing. We've had about 11 percent Indigenous employment, only 26 percent northern employment, and 17 percent female employment. And we're also seeing the loss of the regional training partnership, which it seems was not as successful as hoped anyway. And so can the Minister give us any insights on what -- what went wrong there, why this training partnership program was not very successful, and we -- we haven't been able to meet our targets yet? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, definitely within this position it was a harder-to-fill position than we had originally anticipated. That said, I have had the opportunity to speak with multiple employers that have worked on the Giant Mine remediation project. And while the procurement numbers for the project have been high, the Member is right, that the northern employment numbers have not matched that. And in conversation with some of the proponents have learned that -- what I've been told is I will be happier with the more recent numbers that come out because they've really focused on working to see increases in northern employment, northern participation, and not just procurement, and so I am hopeful and looking forward to seeing kind of updated numbers and will continue to work with the proponents that are working on and are successful in bidding on these projects to ensure that we see more and more Northerners working on the Giant Mine remediation. This ultimately is our goal. It's not just within the procurement but within northern employment as well. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So if we are starting to see more successes, what -- what's changed? I think we just need to try to be able to articulate to ourselves and the public, you know, what -- what is going right when things are going better or going right and then what's going wrong when it's not going well because we seem, over the years, to often sort of -- we set these goals for ourselves, we want

Northerners employed, you know, we want jobs, and then it doesn't work out and we go, oh, you know, like, oops, or, you know, who would have known or we just didn't manage it, we don't know why. And if things go well, we need to actually know what's changing or what we're doing better so that we can replicate that or do more of it or put more funding into that. So does the Minister have any more insights into what might be changing if things are starting to turn and for the better? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I can assure the Member that public sector and private sector are not being flippant, that we recognize that there is a tremendous amount of opportunity within the Giant Mine remediation project. A lot of it comes down to, well, one, ensuring that there is lead time to upcoming procurement and that locals have not just the time to bid on projects, as we're seeing through the success in procurement and the high procurement numbers, but also the time to prepare their workforce. And so, one, it's having the available workforce and, two, having the properly trained workforce. So two components of that. One, making sure that we are supporting our industry partners to pursue the training that they need to pursue, making sure that we are supporting them through different workforce development funding arrangements, making sure that if there is opportunity for training that we are working together to try and connect those people at the end of the day. And so I will say a lot of our opportunity needs to be captured through being very purposeful in our workforce development in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So final question here, hopefully, so it sounds like that the North Slave regional training partnership was not really the thing or the vehicle to be able to make those kinds of things happen. It hasn't been decided that it works well enough for ECE to directly provide that support and be liaising with contractors and -- and that we don't need these kind of special, you know, training partnerships or other vehicles set up, or is there an eye to try to set up some new initiative or organization or working group or committee or something to try to ensure that some momentum is gained around increasing northern employment on these projects? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, just because this role is not currently filled and has sunset does not mean that this work has stopped. As I mentioned to the Member for Great Slave, we're increasing funding in this area. As we go forward, this is an area where I want to see more and more opportunities and I, you know, look forward to coming back to Members of this House and letting them know I've spent all the workforce development training dollars and because that means that Northerners are receiving the training that they need in order to fill the roles that we need filled in the territory to capture a lot of this economic development opportunity.

I think what it comes down to, especially when, you know, we don't and nor should we have kind of a bricks-and-mortar training institution in every single community across the territory. That's not realistic. What, though, is realistic is making sure that people are doing -- are able to access training, doing training on the job, so that we are -- we have Northerners working, we are succeeding in gaining the opportunities from these projects, that we are also at the end of the day ensuring that Northerners are ending up with further education, further training, further certifications, that they need to continue to grab hold of these procurement opportunities. And so we want to make sure that from one opportunity to the next these skill sets and these certifications are transferable, are importable, and then at the same time, you know, that this is not just something that is -- for example for Giant Mine, this is something that is needed when we're talking about Mackenzie Valley Highway, when we're talking about other opportunities that come to this territory, that we're being purposeful in the training that is needed. Because we know that we need workers, that we need people in this territory. We know that, you know, for example, our nominee program does not begin to fill our labour needs, and we need to make sure that we as Northerners are filling these roles as best we can across the territory. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Minister. Moving on, any further questions? Seeing none, please turn to page 52.

Education, Culture and Employment, labour development and standards, \$18,666,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, committee. Moving on to languages, culture, on

page 56, with information items on 58 to 60. Are there any questions? To the Member, Great Slave.

MS. REID: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. As the Minister knows, culture and heritage, near and dear to my heart.

In the business plan, there is a piece around planning to include heritage resources in emergency planning and that draft steps to implement planning are expected in summer of 2026. Could the Minister provide a scope of work on that particular item insofar as I assume it's heritage resources contemplated in both institutions as well as perhaps archaeological pieces, but I just would like to seek some clarity around that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd love to talk about workforce development until the bison come home, but for this one I will pass to the deputy.

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

MR. JAMIE FULFORD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And the Member is correct that this refers to both heritage resources on the land and in institutions. I think primarily what this is referring to is archaeological and in the Beaufort Delta in particular, with the eroding coastlines and the loss of heritage resources into the Beaufort Sea. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, you know, we're gonna make the Minister a passionate fan of culture and heritage if it's the last thing I do. That's good to hear. And I just declare one more point of clarity, Mr. Chair. Will we be seeing steps on -- or draft steps to implement as committee in summer of 2026? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: I'd like to pass to the deputy, please, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. JAMIE FULFORD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I anticipate that we would be sharing those with committee when they're determined. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So in the business plan, it says summer 2026. Is that still on time? Thank you.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The answer is yes.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Okay, thank you, Minister. To the Member Great Slave.

MS. REID: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Chair. And to the main estimates, I believe the only real substantive pieces that have changed from the previous main estimates to this main estimates in terms of dollar figure is an increase to Francophone services for the educational authorities, Aurora College and WSCC in provision of services in French, and possibly the reduction is with two staff, one full-time and one part-time. Is that really the only money that is being moved around right now? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: I believe that's correct, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So some of the work that's being contemplated with the legislation and the work that is ongoing for future Assemblies, be it the Archives Act or the Heritage Resources Act -- I apologize if that's not the correct title -- that work is being contemplated in existing resources? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, and we continue to work on those pieces of legislation internally to the department. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think those are all my thoughts for right now.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member. Any further questions? Seeing none. Education, culture, no further questions, we'll please turn to page 57.

Education, Culture and Employment, languages and culture, \$16,975,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, committee. There are additional information items on pages 61 to 68. Are there any further questions? Seeing none, thank you, Members. Please turn now to department summary found on page 29, with information items on pages 30 to 33. Are there any questions -- bear with me there.

Okay, here we go. Are there any questions? Seeing none, seeing no further questions there, committee, I will now turn now call the department summary.

Education, Culture and Employment, operations expenditures, total department for 2026 2027 Main Estimates, \$414,396,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you. Thank you to the Minister, and thanks to the witnesses for appearing before us. Please, Sergeant-at-Arms, escort the witnesses from the chamber. Mahsi.

What is the wish of committee? Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

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

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): The motion is in order. The motion is non-debatable. All those in favour? The motion is carried.

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress. Mahsi.

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. SPEAKER: Got something to say, Yellowknife Centre? No? Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh -- oh, Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Things happen in your absence. Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 448-20(1) and, Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Can I have a seconder? I think I am going to go to Mackenzie Delta. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carried.

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

Third Reading of Bills

BILL 43:
SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT
(INFRASTRUCTURE EXPENDITURES),
NO. 3, 2025-2026,
CARRIED

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Kam Lake, that Bill 43, Supplementary Appropriation Act (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 3, 2025-2026, be read for the third time.

Mr. Speaker, I would request a recorded vote. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister of Finance has asked for a recorded vote. All those in favour, please stand.

RECORDED VOTE

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu): The Member for Yellowknife South. The Member for Kam Lake. The Member for Hay River North. The Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. The Member for Nunakput. The Member for the Sahtu. The Member for Inuvik Boot Lake. The Member for Frame Lake. The Member for Great Slave. The Member for Mackenzie Delta. The Member for Yellowknife North. The Member for Thebacha.

MR. SPEAKER: All those opposed, please stand.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu): The Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. The Member for Yellowknife Centre. The Member for Range Lake. The Member for Monfwi.

MR. SPEAKER: Those all abstaining, please stand.

The results of the recorded vote are 12 in favour, 4 opposed, zero abstention. The motion is carried. Bill 43 has had third reading.

---Carried

Third reading of bills. Minister of Finance.

BILL 44:
SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT
(OPERATIONS EXPENDITURES AND
BORROWING AUTHORIZATION), NO. 3,
2025-2026,
CARRIED

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member

for Inuvik Twin Lakes, that Bill 44, Supplementary Appropriation Act (Operations Expenditures and Borrowing Authorization), No. 3, 2025-2026, be read for the third time.

Mr. Speaker, I request a recorded vote. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. Minister of Finance has asked for a recorded vote. All those in favour, please stand.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu): The Member for Yellowknife South. The Member for Kam Lake. The Member for Hay River North. The Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. The Member for Nunakput. The Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh. The Member for Sahtu. The Member for Yellowknife Centre. The Member for Range Lake. The Member for Inuvik Boot Lake. The Member for Monfwi. The Member for Frame Lake. The Member for Great Slave. The Member for Mackenzie Delta. The Member for Yellowknife North. The Member for Thebacha.

MR. SPEAKER: All those opposed, please stand. All those abstaining, please stand. Thank you. The results of the recorded vote are 16 in favour, zero opposed, and zero abstentions. The motion is carried. Bill 44 has had its third reading.

---Carried

Third reading of bills. Orders of the day, Mr. Clerk.

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr Harjot Sidhu): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Tuesday, February 24th, 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

- Written Question 32-20(1), Medical Travel Costs, Budget Pressures and Travel Volumes
- Written Question 33-20(1), Medical Travel Delays, Coordination, Communication and Repeat Travel
- Written Question 34-20(1), Medical Travel Escort Policies, Eligibility and Appeals

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

17. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills

18. First Reading of Bills

19. Second Reading of Bills

- Bill 42, Tlego'hli Got'ine Self-Government Agreement Act

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

- Bill 33-20(1), Technical Safety Statutes Amendment Act
- Bill 35-20(1), Miscellaneous Statute Law Amendment Act
- Committee Report 35-20(1), Standing Committee on Public Accounts Report on the Review of the Auditor General's 2025

Audit of Protected and Conserved Areas
in the Northwest Territories

- 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 24th, 2026, at 1:30 a.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 5:50 p.m.

UNEDITED HANSARD