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**The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker**

# Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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**YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES****Thursday, February 26, 2026****Members Present**

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

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

**Prayer or Reflection**

---Prayer or reflection

**SPEAKER (HON. SHANE THOMPSON):**

Thank you, please be seated. I'd like to thank MaryJane Cazon for her opening prayer and reflections. Ministers' Statements. Minister of ITI.

**Ministers' Statements**

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 186-20(1):  
TOURISM 2030 UPDATE

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Mr. Speaker, a strong economy does not happen by accident, especially here in the North. The Government of the Northwest Territories is not sitting and waiting for a miracle. We are focused on steady groundwork and diversification, and our efforts are paying off.

The Northwest Territories economy is more diversified than many see, but we need to continue to grow our diverse sectors. It is powered by people and industries that reach far beyond resource development like film, small business, arts and culture, fishing, emerging innovation sectors and, what I speak of today, tourism.

Last year, we welcomed more than 75,000 visitors who contributed an estimated \$155 million in spending. Nearly one in twelve jobs in the NWT are linked to tourism, underscoring the sector's important role in the economy and its potential for further growth. This sector is ripe with opportunities, creating pathways to employment and entrepreneurship for Northerners across the entire territory.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to provide an update on Tourism 2030, the next five-year plan to grow and evolve the tourism economy. Tourism 2030 will be released in April and is built by Northerners, through extensive engagement across the territory.

The government clearly heard that tourism must grow in a way that delivers real benefits to communities, protects the land, strengthens culture, and ensures visitors leave with experiences they will never forget. Tourism 2030 will be built around five clear priorities:

- Building industry capacity;
- Enhancing visitor experiences;
- Expanding sustainable tourism products;
- Strengthening marketing and communications; and,
- Making better use of data.

Each priority is supported by concrete actions, timelines, and measurable outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, we have already begun work on capacity building, with continued support for tourism mentorship programs, training funds, and workshops that help operators grow and improve service quality. These efforts reflect Tourism 2030's focus on workforce development so operators and communities can capitalize on new markets and the right types of visitors.

Enhancing visitor experiences is two-fold, requiring investments in community-based tourism and sustainable tourism products. Programs like the community tourism coordinators program help ensure visitors experience the Northwest Territories through authentic stories, local knowledge, and meaningful connections with the people who live here.

Mr. Speaker, for people to travel here, they must first know we are here, ready to welcome them and introduce them to the spectacular Northwest Territories. ITI works closely with Northwest Territories Tourism, marketing and promoting the territory under the highly recognizable Spectacular Northwest Territories brand. At the same time, outreach within the territory will increase through the Value of Tourism campaign, which highlights how

tourism supports local jobs, businesses and community vitality.

Finally, to ensure the actions laid out in Tourism 2030 are evidence-based, responsive, and effective, data and research will be better utilized. Embedding data into all decision-making positions the government to track progress, adapt when needed, and remain accountable to residents and industry.

Tourism is good for the economy of the Northwest Territories and brings so much more. It is a way of sharing who we are, where we come from, and how we live on this land. It creates connections between visitors and communities, supports the preservation of culture and traditions, and strengthens pride in the stories and experiences that make the North unique.

Tourism 2030 will provide a clear path forward, shaped by northern voices and grounded in sustainability and culture. It reinforces our commitment to ensuring tourism creates real opportunities for Northerners, from good jobs to new business ventures, and delivers lasting benefits for communities across the territory.

Mr. Speaker, the work is underway, and I look forward to continuing to report on our progress as we continue to build a resilient, inclusive, and world-class tourism sector for the Northwest Territories. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of ITI. Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Housing NWT.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 187-20(1):  
AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA  
PROGRESS UPDATE

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Mr. Speaker, last fall, the auditor general released its report on housing in the Northwest Territories. This was a call to action, and we are answering it. Staff and leadership remain committed to transparency and view the audit findings as an opportunity to improve the suitability, accessibility, and affordability of housing across the territory.

The audit highlighted opportunities to strengthen our programs and services, our partnerships with the local housing organizations, and our capacity to equitably serve residents. It also reinforced areas that we knew required attention and where, in some cases, improvements were already in progress. Although we are only four months post-audit, I would like to provide an update on the progress we have made to date, and the actions planned

or underway across all areas identified in the report.

In alignment with the audit's recommendation, we are improving the monitoring of local housing organizations. We have begun scoping a new monitoring framework and started consultations with LHO managers and district offices. We are updating the LHO administration manual and have implemented monthly touchpoints for staff and LHOs to increase training on policies and procedures. These actions are intended to strengthen transparency, consistency, and fairness in how social housing units are allocated across the territory.

Mr. Speaker, on maintenance and asset management, at Housing NWT we are focused on enhancing processes and accountability. A modernized system of maintenance management has now been implemented across all LHOs, supported by ongoing training and new online reporting tools. We are reviewing and renewing community housing services agreements, and a formalized quarterly reporting process will be implemented this year. Housing NWT has also completed a capacity gap assessment for maintenance activities. These steps will ensure maintenance activities are documented, reported, and acted on regularly and effectively.

The auditor general also identified gaps in our monitoring and evaluation of homeownership programs. We have increased capacity in oversight of our homeownership programs to support the development of a compliance monitoring program that ensures program eligibility and parameters are followed.

Mr. Speaker, on the need to evaluate our homeownership program, I would like to note that this work is being conducted through the government renewal initiative and ensures program evaluations are completed to better measure outcomes and guide future improvements. Housing NWT has reprofiled a position and hired an additional staff member to support program design and evaluation. An evaluation framework for the emergency repair and the social housing maintenance programs will be finalized shortly. Last, but not least, we are determining where to partner with Indigenous governments or other interested governments and organizations to improve the delivery and service of homeownership repair programs.

Mr. Speaker, the auditor general found that Housing NWT had begun to deliver on this government's commitment to deliver an updated housing needs assessment and better understand housing needs in the NWT. We

have recently completed the territorial housing needs assessment to identify what housing supports are needed and where.

We recognize that there is more work needs to be done. We are actively exploring options to increase capacity, both within Housing NWT and across all LHOs. We have also acknowledged as a government that housing is a shared responsibility, so we cannot do this work alone. We will continue to advocate for increased federal funding so we have the tools to guarantee equitable access and consistent application of informed criteria. Everyone deserves a safe, healthy place to call home and we have a responsibility to uphold our role in providing that. Quyananni, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Ministers' statements. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 188-20(1):  
RECOGNIZING OUTSTANDING  
VOLUNTEER AWARDS RECIPIENTS FOR  
2025

**HON. VINCE McKAY:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate all the nominees for the 2025 Northwest Territories Outstanding Volunteer Awards and to celebrate this year's winners.

This year marks 35 years since the NWT Outstanding Volunteer Awards program was established and 115 remarkable Northerners have been recognized since its inception in 1991. The Outstanding Volunteer Award continue to highlight the extraordinary contributions of volunteers, and the essential role volunteerism plays in communities across the Northwest Territories.

Volunteering is an act of kindness, given freely without expectation of recognition. Volunteers embody the spirit of service: Strengthening community connections, building resilience, and offering support where it is needed most. Through their time, energy, and compassion, they help create a healthier, more vibrant, and thriving territory for all of us.

Mr. Speaker, each year, the NWT Outstanding Volunteer Awards accept nominations in four categories: Youth, Elder, Individual, and Group. This year, we received 50 nominations from 19 communities.

To all the individuals nominated, I extend my sincere appreciation. Your contributions are truly invaluable, not only to your home communities but also to the entire Northwest Territories. Without your dedication, so many programs and initiatives would not be possible.

Your efforts make a real difference, and we are grateful for all you do.

Mr. Speaker, today I had the honour of presenting the 2025 Outstanding Volunteer Awards at the Legislative Assembly, and I would like to recognize this year's recipients.

The Outstanding Youth Award was presented to Ava Erasmus of Fort Simpson for her leadership and dedication to local sports organizations and the Fort Simpson Fire Department.

The Outstanding Individual Award was presented to Brian McShane, who was honoured for his many years of leadership and service with the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary.

The Outstanding Elder Award was presented to Gloria Faye Johns of Hay River for her dedication, leadership, and long-standing commitment to many carnivals in the South Slave, as well as for her support of families during difficult times.

The Outstanding Group Award was presented to the Run for Our Lives committee from Yellowknife, which has been recognized for more than 20 years for organizing community events and fundraising to improve cancer care in the North.

Congratulations to all the Award recipients. Your commitment not only fosters positive change but also motivates others to participate and contribute in their own ways. Your actions show that even the smallest contributions can leave a lasting impression on our communities.

I would also like to express my appreciation to everyone who took the time to nominate their fellow residents. Your efforts to acknowledge others' contributions strengthen the generosity and community pride that characterize these individuals and our territory.

Mr. Speaker, as we look ahead, it is especially meaningful that the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 2026 the International Year of Volunteers and Sustainable Development. This designation serves as a global reminder of the vital role volunteers play in shaping a stronger, more resilient world. I encourage everyone to keep the spirit of volunteerism.

Nominations for the NWT Outstanding Volunteer Award are open year-round, and I urge residents to recognize those who consistently go above and beyond in service to others. Let us be inspired by the remarkable example set by this year's recipients and let us continue working together to make our

communities stronger, more vibrant, and full of possibility. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Range Lake.

### Members' Statements

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT 930-20(1): INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HEALTHCARE

**MR. TESTART:** Mr. Speaker, every year, the Canadian Institute for Health Information releases emergency department data from across Canada, covering wait times, diagnoses, and circumstances of patients who leave without being seen. Every participating jurisdiction relies on this data to guide decisions and ensure public accountability because it is essential for planning and reporting. Even though the CIHI's expert panel recommends every jurisdiction participate, health and social services does not and they don't submit even a single emergency department visit, not from Stanton and not from any emergency department in the Northwest Territories. This means the Minister cannot report in national comparable term why patients present to Stanton's emergency department, or under any circumstances why they leave. And without this data, the Northwest Territories cannot take part in national opioid, mental health, or infectious disease surveillance.

While the Minister has stated that the NWT provides data to CIHI as part of their standardized national reporting programs, she has not yet acknowledged that emergency department reporting is entirely absent. Certified health management specialists could solve this problem, yet there are only about ten in the North with no relief positions, and they are excluded from the labour market supplement. Their work is being supported by uncertified staff.

The Minister told this House last October that health and social services' IT is outdated and we can't do anything more. But that is because the vendor has stopped supporting it. Yet when the government found money for an AI note-taking tool, well, hospital inpatient charts are still on paper. The Minister's own primary care framework lists data infrastructure as a precondition for the transformational changes she promises. But transformation starts with reliable data. She cannot track whether care is reaching small communities if the data isn't collected. She cannot report health outcomes to Indigenous governments if the system

cannot even code an emergency department visit. And she cannot promote Indigenous data sovereignty over data that doesn't exist.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for this government to invest in reliable data, properly staff our health information management professionals, and ensure every emergency department visit is captured so this government can make better decisions, improve outcomes, and ensure transformation means residents receive the care they need today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker

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

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT 931-20(1): ROCK THE RINGS CURLING FESTIVAL

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, beginning tomorrow, Curling NWT and the Yellowknife Curling Club will be hosting the 6th annual Rock the Rings Curling Festival. This event is intended to introduce NWT youth to the roaring sport of curling in various under 12, under 15, and under 20 divisions.

Approximately 65 youths from Yellowknife, Hay River, Inuvik, Tsiigehtchic will be curling, bowling, swimming, and having a rocking time, Mr. Speaker. Nearly half the participants will be from my home community of Inuvik. In fact, I've been told that Inuvik has fared quite well at the event over the past couple of years, taking home the majority of the championship banners.

I would also like to recognize two junior curling teams from Inuvik that have represented the NWT at the Canadian under 18 junior curling championships for the past three years.

Team Wainman and Team Wilcom have dominated the under 18 division in the NWT in recent years. In fact, Team Wainman, who are Reese Wainman, Brooke Smith, Emilia Mehring, and Hayden Smith, just went on a historic run at the recent U-18 event in Timmins, Ontario, winning four of their six round robin games and becoming, to my knowledge, only the second team from the NWT to make the playoffs at a Canadian junior national event.

Mr. Speaker, both Team Wainman and Team Wilcom will be representing Inuvik at the NWT upcoming Arctic Winter Games in Whitehorse. I would like to thank all the chaperones, volunteers, fundraisers, and parents who make this such a special event in Yellowknife. I encourage everyone to stop by the Yellowknife Curling Club this weekend, say hi, and cheer on our youth athletes.

A special thank you to Coach Nick Saturnino for his continued dedication to Inuvik Curling and Curling NT as its current president. He has led the helm of the Inuvik Curling Club since 2008. He is all things curling, Mr. Speaker, in our community and tirelessly works on everything from ice making, fundraising, and organizing bonspiels and events.

Nick's passion has always been to grow the sport among young people, and the junior curling program in Inuvik now has over 80 youth participating. As coach of Team Wainman, I know he couldn't be prouder of what they've accomplished, what the future holds for this dynamic team, and all our youth curlers in the NWT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 932-20(1):  
GLOBAL WATER BANKRUPTCY

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Water is our most precious resource, and working together is how we protect it in partnership with Indigenous governments. I want to thank my colleague from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh for raising concerns with Alberta proposing wastewater release from oil sands into the territory's watershed. From the beginning of this Assembly, on my office wall you can find a map of the Mackenzie Basin watershed. Water from northern Alberta, British Columbia, parts of Saskatchewan, and the Yukon all flow through the mighty Dehcho to the Arctic Ocean.

The NWT has one of the most pristine watersheds in the world. This is something that we should be able to celebrate. Instead, I am alarmed by the recent report from the United Nations researchers stating that the world has moved beyond a water crisis and now into a state of global water bankruptcy. This means persistent shortages of water cannot be re-established to baseline capacity. Water extraction and overuse favours powerful actors in industry, while the rest of the world -- disproportionately Indigenous peoples, women, youth, and the low-income global majority -- face catastrophic effects.

Assuming the NWT will continue to enjoy undisturbed, continued natural access to pristine and clean water without the need for proactive intervention is not realistic. Global water bankruptcy presents a real threat to the environment and economy. Outdated agricultural practices have been a major historical driver of global water bankruptcy and closer to home, we face known concerns, with the oil sands, and new concerns including AI

data centres that consume massive amounts of freshwater.

Mr. Speaker, ensuring we have access to enough clean drinking water will continue to grow as a concern, as climate change continues to impact huge swings in water quantity through drought and flood. These concerns are dire in other parts of North America, and I want to ensure we are proactive in this space. This doesn't even begin to touch upon the concern that our water infrastructure throughout the territory needs upgrading.

Mr. Speaker, I am thankful that within the framework of the GNWT, there is an executive council policy 53.02, the sustainable development policy, that balances resource development with effective stewardship of our land and water. Sustainable development in the territory cannot occur on a resource that has run dry. Mr. Speaker, I will seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, colleagues. If we lose access to pristine water quality and run dry on water quantity, we are in a heap of trouble. I know that there are scientists and community-based monitors who keep tabs on both, but in recent years of drought and now inter-jurisdictional threat, Mr. Speaker, we have to proactively ensure we are doing everything we can. As long as the sun rises from east to west, as long as the river flows downstream, as long as this land shall last, these are not simply pretty words; they are a promise. Water is not a commodity; water is life. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 933-20(1):  
PRIMARY HEALTHCARE SERVICES

**MS. MORGAN:** Mr. Speaker, here in Yellowknife it can be challenging to get a primary care appointment, Sometimes next to impossible. Ultimately, the solution is to recruit and retain more physicians, nurse practitioners, and other providers. There is no getting around that. But in the meantime, there is more we can do to improve people's access to appointments.

At least a quarter of Yellowknife's population has not yet been assigned to a team even though we all received a letter in October 2024 saying everyone would soon be assigned to a team. So if you're not on a team, then you're told to call for a same-day appointment, which are notoriously hard to get. And with same-day

appointments, there's no triaging happening so the slots could all get filled with issues that aren't urgent at all.

So we could start by establishing a process for making sure that higher-risk patients with complex needs get assigned to a care team on a priority basis. The Ministers told me that's supposed to be happening in theory, but practitioners tell me that there is no systematic process on the ground, especially if you're only seeing local physicians.

Second, available appointment times are being wasted because of no-shows. We could be sending folks reminder phone calls or texts for every primary care appointment. The dentist can do it. Public health does it. So let's make it standard practice in primary care.

Third, given that we have a lot of locum physicians right now, we should be trying to maximize opportunities for virtual appointments so there's better continuity of care. What if we gave a locum a few hours of remote work hours, say the week after their contract, to follow up with patients on things like test results. And with the locum physicians that come here regularly, we could even try to arrange some virtual clinic days to open up new appointments by videoconference.

Currently, virtual care in the NWT seems to be done on an ad hoc basis here and there, but we need some sort of virtual care strategy. It's not just about having the technology. The bigger missing piece is organizing the people who will agree to be available when and who will coordinate.

Mr. Speaker, while we work on staffing up our primary care teams, let's also tackle the lower-hanging fruit to ensure more people can access the appointments they need. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 934-20(1):  
"FOLLOWING THE NORTH STAR: PRIMARY  
HEALTH CARE REIMAGINED TOGETHER"  
SUMMIT

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of weeks ago in January, GNWT staff hosted the Following the North Star: Reimagining Primary and Community Health Care in the North summit, and MLAs were invited to attend an art exhibit developed by the community culture and innovation team inviting leaders to learn and reimagine health care in the North to better focus on the people it's

serving. I appreciated the opportunity to broaden my understanding of Indigenous experiences of health care and to see the vision that is forming around primary healthcare reform: A patient-centered, culturally appropriate and responsive system. I think we can all agree this is what we should be working towards.

When staff asked me for feedback on how I felt following the session, a few things stood out to me. One was that similar to thoughts shared by the Member for Yellowknife North in her statement earlier this sitting that I don't feel our system currently has a strong foundation on which to build the vision we are working towards. I don't want to suggest we aren't headed in the right direction. I really appreciate the work being done. I just want to make sure we are also putting the pieces in place in the right order to ensure that vision can flourish. We need stability in our system to be able to achieve the expansive vision our staff are working to develop.

Another thing that stood out to me in the exhibit was that building midwifery surfaces into our system was included in the vision, which I was happy to see, and makes sense as growing midwifery will clearly be a part of creating a more culturally appropriate and patient-centered system. But that seems to run counter to what I've seen the health department actually doing.

Cuts to midwifery services brought forward by the health Minister were a hotly debated topic in 2023 and raised significant public concern. Since then, I have been advocating for midwifery on behalf of constituents who see this as an essential service and want more access to this support. I am hoping the health Minister will be able to shed some light on this apparent disparity between our vision and actions, Mr. Speaker, and I will reiterate the same point I make every time I speak on this issue. The need for expanded midwifery services in our territory is not going away. The Minister's own staff are advocating for it. So what are we going to do to meet that need? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Members' statements. Member from the Dehcho.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 935-20(1):  
THREE-PHASE ELECTRIC POWER IN  
ENTERPRISE

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. As many of us know, the community of Enterprise has been fighting for its very survival since the 2023 wildfire reduced most of the hamlet to

ashes. Families lost homes, businesses disappeared overnight, and a once thriving community was left to pick up the pieces.

In the months and years since, the people of Enterprise have demonstrated remarkable resilience and determination. They are rebuilding their community with pride and with hope but hope alone cannot power our homes, businesses, or public infrastructure. Today, the urgent restoration of three-phase power is not just a technical requirement; it is a lifeline. Without it, Enterprise cannot truly recover, cannot rebuild with confidence, and cannot secure the economic stability its residents have worked so hard to regain.

Three-phase power is not a luxury. It is a basic requirement for any modern community. Without it, new construction is constrained, economic development is stalled, and essential facilities cannot operate reliably. The hamlet cannot attract investment or support the return of displaced residents if its electrical grid remains insufficient for even modest growth.

Mr. Speaker, restoring the three-phase power is an investment in safety, in economic opportunity, and in reconciliation with a community that has already sacrificed so much. It is a concrete achievable action that will accelerate rebuilding and restore confidence in Enterprise's future.

This government must work collaboratively with the Hamlet of Enterprise, the Northwest Territories Power Corporation, and federal partners, as well as NAKA, to advance this infrastructure without delay. The residents of Enterprise have waited long enough. They deserve the same reliable electrical service that other communities take for granted.

Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure that Enterprise has the power, literally and figuratively, to rebuild stronger than ever. I will have questions for the Minister of NTPC later. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 936-20(1):  
MEDICAL TRAVEL

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I am going to be talking about medical travel.

Mr. Speaker, residents of the Northwest Territories should be supported during medical emergency wherever those emergencies occur; however, when residents fall ill while outside the territory, they are not eligible for

GNWT-approved medical travel. While emergency treatment outside the territory may be covered, the expenses that come with an unexpected illness while traveling are not. Rebooked flights, extended stays, and accommodation near a hospital are often unavoidable when someone cannot safely return home as planned. A resident who is hospitalized may need to remain in another jurisdiction for follow-up care or observation.

Mr. Speaker, they may be unable to travel on their original return date and must change their flight. They may need to stay close to the hospital while waiting for discharge or specialist directions. These costs can quickly reach thousands of dollars.

Mr. Speaker, it is common for residents to travel out of the territory for work, school, family responsibilities, and many other reasons. Travel is simply part of northern life when many services are not available at home. No one plans to become sick while away, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there are also concerns about access to Larga accommodations. When residents do not have GNWT-approved medical travel, they cannot stay at Larga even if they are receiving necessary care. That means, Mr. Speaker, finding and paying for private accommodations at market rates often on short notice. Mr. Speaker, this is not about special treatment or discretionary travel. It is about ensuring residents are supported when they experience an unexpected medical event. In moments of crisis, people should be able to rely on their government for support. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 937-20(1):  
FUTURE OF THE MINING INDUSTRY IN  
THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Northwest Territories is undergoing a profound economic downshift. It's a decline in our mining sector, as we all know. It's long been the foundation of our territorial economy, and it's winding down as we all can see. If you can imagine, it's like the music is no longer playing. It's getting quieter and quieter.

Mr. Speaker, is anyone noticing the music has started to stop? As it downturns, we need to reshape our economy, and I can appreciate the fact that our mining economy is at least a third of our GDP. But think of it as this: Every one of us is affected by loss of jobs. Every one of us is

affected by constituents that no longer have contracts and services. This puts pressure on rents. This puts pressure on mortgages. This puts pressure on families, Mr. Speaker.

The impending closure may be a natural life cycle of diamond mines, but it is not a natural life cycle of governments to sit here paralyzed watching this. So imagine for a moment, Mr. Speaker, the band is now finished playing, they're packing up and walking off the stage. They're not coming back for an encore. Not one of these diamond mines is going to do a gotcha moment and say ah well, we were always intending to just see what would happen and we're going to open up this pipe that we always pretended we ignored but we knew was too juicy to leave. That isn't going to be the case, Mr. Speaker.

The story is going to be, when I was young I remember Pine Points. There was a big sign that says the last person to leave, turn off the lights. That sign stood there for years. Mr. Speaker, the diamond industry has now pulled out the big sheet of plywood, someone's buying the paint, and they're trying to decide who's going to paint the sign to say the last person to leave this economy, turn off the lights.

Mr. Speaker, I did welcome the finance Minister's temporary relief on the tax, property tax, some of the carbon tax funds, and etcetera, but none of that has been bridging to new opportunities. It's literally just to keep the lights on.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot tourist our way out of this difficult challenge. If you are a fish, you need to swim. The NWT is a mining resource industry economy, we need to develop, Mr. Speaker. We can't lose that message. Mr. Speaker, it's got to sink in before the music completely stops and the band is completely off the stage. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 938-20(1):  
2025 NORTHWEST TERRITORIES YOUTH  
VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD  
RECIPIENT AVA ERASMUS

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Colleagues, today I have the pleasure of recognizing an exceptional young leader from Fort Simpson, Ms. Ava Erasmus, who was awarded the 2025 NWT Youth Volunteer Award today. Ava grew up in our community, participating in the very programs she now helps to deliver. As a child she was involved in speed skating, track and field, and cadets, building the skills, discipline, and community spirit that continue to guide

her today. What makes this award so meaningful is that Ava has chosen to come back from university to give back to the youth of Fort Simpson and the Northwest Territories, and to invest her time and talent where they are needed most.

Ava is a dedicated coach with the local skating club, teaching both skating skills and speed skating to young athletes. She began helping little children learn to skate when she was only eleven years old, and that genuine desire to support others has only grown stronger. The skaters she works with feel encouraged and supported by her patient, positive approach, and they see in Ava an example of what is possible when you commit to your sport and your community.

Beyond the rink, Ava has served for the past couple of years as a member of the Fort Simpson Volunteer Fire Department, where she participates in regular training and responds to both ambulance and fire calls, often in challenging conditions. She also represented Nahendeh as the Youth Parliamentarian in 2019, demonstrating leadership and an interest in public service at a young age.

During the award ceremonies, the director of sport and recreation did a great job articulating what Ava has done. Then when Ava accepted the award, she did a great speech. I have added both of these speeches at the end of this statement and ask them be deemed as read and printed in the Hansard.

Colleagues, I have known this young woman her entire life and continue to be amazed by all that she is able to do. Ava embodies the very best of youth volunteerism, and I ask all Members of this House to join me in congratulating her on receiving the 2025 NWT Youth Volunteer Award. Congratulations, Ava. I know your family and friends are very proud of you.

**2025 YOUTH CATEGORY Alison Brown,  
director of sport and recreation.**

I would like to introduce you to Ava Erasmus, our 2025 Outstanding Volunteer in the Youth category.

Ava is an outstanding example of youth leadership and community spirit in Fort Simpson. At just 21 years old, she has dedicated countless hours to volunteering in multiple roles. For over two and a half years, Ava has been an active Member of the Fort Simpson Volunteer Fire Department, attending weekly training sessions and responding to both fire and ambulance calls providing critical assistance during emergencies and supporting

her fellow volunteers. Beyond this, Ava gives back to local youth as a volunteer coach with the Fort Simpson Speed Skating Club, where she not only leads practices three times a week but also travels with skaters to competitions, organizes fundraisers, and manages social media to celebrate their achievements. Recently, Ava joined the curling club's volunteer board, continuing her commitment to strengthening community programs. Her energy, kindness, and willingness to learn make her a role model for youth and a vital contributor to making Fort Simpson a great place to live. Ava has shown an exceptional commitment to making a positive impact in her community.

Congratulations, Ava, and thank you!

### **Ava Erasmus Speech**

I am really honoured to be here today, and I am grateful to receive this award. It means a lot not just to me, but to everyone who's been part of getting me here.

Honestly, I know I wouldn't be up here without the people I volunteer with. The people who show up early, stay late, and keep things moving even when no one sees it. Things get done in our community because people care enough to step in and help. It's really that simple.

Communities don't run on their own. They work because people give their time, their energy, and whatever skills they have to make things a little better. Every hour someone puts in creates something real whether that's a program, a reason for people to come together, or an overall safer community.

I've had the chance to work with people who really care about our community, and they're the reason it's a place we're proud to live in. Volunteering isn't about recognition, it's about showing up and helping create something better for everyone. And if I've learned anything, it's that every small effort adds up to something incredible because of the people behind it.

So even though this award has my name on it, it really belongs to everyone who volunteers, supports, and puts in the time to make our community what it is. Thank you for everything you do.

Members' statements. Recognition of visitors in the gallery.

### **Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery**

**MR. SPEAKER:** I would like to recognize the little lady I just finished talking about, Ms. Ava Erasmus. She's an amazing young lady as I said in my Member's statement, but she was a Youth Parliamentarian in 2019, and she told me that at some point in time she will hold the seat for the Nahendeh. So I look forward to that, having her voice here. So welcome to the Assembly, and thank you very much for receiving your award here today.

Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Notices of motion. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

### **Notices of Motion**

MOTION 68-20(1):  
APPOINTMENT OF MEMBER TO THE  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HUMAN  
RIGHTS COMMISSION

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Monday, March 2nd, 2026, I will move the following motion:

Now therefore I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Kam Lake, that Ms. Jennie Vandermeer of Norman Wells be recommended to the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories for appointment to the Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission, effective immediately for a four-year term.

Mr. Speaker, at the appropriate time I will be seeking unanimous consent to deal with this motion today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Yellowknife Centre. Notices of motion. Motions. Member from the Yellowknife Centre.

### **Motions**

MOTION 68-20(1):  
APPOINTMENT OF MEMBER TO THE  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HUMAN  
RIGHTS COMMISSION,  
CARRIED

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to deal with the motion I gave notice of earlier today.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Member is seeking unanimous consent to consider the motion for which notice was given earlier today. Hearing no nays, Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you, colleagues. Mr. Speaker,

WHEREAS Section 16.(2) of the Human Rights Act provides that the Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission is composed of such members, between three and five in number, as may be appointed by the Commissioner on the recommendation of the Legislative Assembly;

AND WHEREAS there is a single vacancy on the Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission;

AND WHEREAS Section 17(1) of the Human Rights Act provides that members of the Commission hold office at pleasure or for a term not exceeding four years;

AND WHEREAS the Legislative Assembly is prepared to make a recommendation to the Commissioner;

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Kam Lake, that Ms. Jennie Vandermeer of Norman Wells be recommended to the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission effective immediately for a four-year term.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. 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 carried.

---Carried

Motions. Member from Range Lake.

MOTION 67-20(1):  
ESTABLISHMENT OF AN OFFICE OF THE  
CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCATE,  
CARRIED

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Canada is a signatory, affirms that children have the right to express their views on all matters affecting them and to have their best interests treated as a primary consideration;

AND WHEREAS most children in care in the Northwest Territories are First Nations, Inuit, and Metis reflecting a long-standing and well-documented historical inequity that continues to impact Indigenous children and families;

AND WHEREAS children and youth in the Northwest Territories, particularly those engaged with child and family services, those living with disabilities, and Indigenous youth, face systemic barriers that require independent, consistent, and culturally informed advocacy;

AND WHEREAS the Northwest Territories has an ombud to investigate administrative fairness across territorial public bodies, but does not have a legislated child and youth-specific advocate or a child and youth-specific ombudsman unit, leaving a gap in dedicated, rights-based oversight for children and youth;

AND WHEREAS the Northwest Territories remains the only Canadian jurisdiction without a legislated Child and Youth Advocate or comparable, dedicated office;

AND WHEREAS the Auditor General of Canada identified significant accountability concerns within the Northwest Territories child and family services system, including inconsistent contact with children in care and deficiencies in service oversight;

AND WHEREAS Call for Justice 12.9 of the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which calls for independent child and youth advocate mechanisms, has not yet been implemented in the Northwest Territories;

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the Member for Monfwi, that this Legislative Assembly calls upon the Government of the Northwest Territories to take immediate steps to establish an independent Office of the Child and Youth Advocate as an officer of the Legislative Assembly;

AND FURTHER, that the Government of the Northwest Territories introduce enabling legislation defining the Advocate's mandate, powers, and responsibilities including, but not limited to, the authority to investigate complaints, initiate systemic reviews, make recommendations, and report directly to the Legislative Assembly;

AND FURTHERMORE, that the Government of the Northwest Territories make comprehensive amendments to the Child and Family Services Act to strengthen transparency and accountability and to require cooperation with, and responsiveness to, the oversight exercised by the Child and Youth Advocate in relation to the administration of the Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the motion my honourable colleague from Monfwi and I have moved today may be another chapter in the ongoing story of Northerners working to secure an independent child and youth advocate for our territory, but it is also another chance to write the ending to this story our children so urgently need.

In the 36 years since Alberta created the first child advocate office in Canada, this has been a story of repeated calls to action in this House going unanswered by government while every other jurisdiction in the country has established independent child and youth advocate offices of their own. This story will not end until such an office exists here in the Northwest Territories because our government has continued to fail our kids, especially those in care, and these failures will continue driving the demand for change, change that can only come through accountability and independent oversight as every other jurisdiction in Canada has already proved.

If this motion succeeds and this government takes action, we can finally fill in the gaps in our social services, give our children the protection and advocacy that they need by upholding their rights, listening to their voices, and providing evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the system and ensure our social services, and indeed all of our government services, deliver the highest possible standard of care and support to kids everywhere in every community. The welfare of children may already be the mandate of child and family services, but the mandate of an independent child and youth advocate is to uphold the rights of the child.

The fact is kids face a significant imbalance of power in society, because unlike adults they often cannot fully represent their own interests or make informed decisions about their welfare, especially when their legal guardian is the government.

This may sound complicated but the truth is simple: All children have rights, and those rights are specific to their needs. In fact, Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, which clearly outlines these rights. For example, children have the right to protection from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury, abuse, neglect, or maltreatment. They have the right to a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development. They have the right to the highest

attainable standard of health and access to medical services, and they have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them.

Child and youth advocates are experts in upholding children's rights, and the key word is balance. When called upon, they assess how a child's rights were considered in a given situation with the goal of finding a resolution and ensuring the child has support during ongoing challenges or harm, and their office can be called into action by parents, teachers, Indigenous governments, social workers, or the child themselves.

On an individual level, child and youth advocates act as crucial navigators for kids. They attend meetings, review service plans, speak with departmental officials, clarify available supports, and help resolve disputes between services, coordinating their efforts to achieve the best possible outcomes. When individual cases reveal concerning trends, child and youth advocates can initiate systemic advocacy, investigating and analyzing trends, structures, policies, and laws that affect more than just one young person at a time.

Their power to do so comes from both strong oversight and meticulous recordkeeping. This is how a child and youth advocate can provide concrete recommendations to the legislature each year. Both individual and systemic advocacy are how children and youth advocates provide children real access to their rights, provide government services with necessary oversight, and give governments and legislatures the information needed to act on departmental or whole of government issues.

Neither the ombud nor the Office of the Children's Lawyer can provide this service. The ombud only responds to complaints and judges fairness in accessing government services while the children's lawyer represents children individually in court.

The Yukon child and youth advocate's office is well aware of the shortcomings of our services here in the Northwest Territories because more of our residents are looking beyond territorial borders each year to seek their support. Last year, 30 percent of the Yukon advocate's caseload involved out of territory files, most of which were residents of the Northwest Territories and most of those residents were Indigenous children.

As MLAs, we know all too well how urgent the need is for a child and youth advocate of our own because families are also turning to our offices in desperate need of support. The most

difficult situations involve children in child and family services' care. A common thread I have observed among foster families is the power imbalance between themselves as caregivers in the system and the department as the legal guardian of the children. This imbalance is one that consistently disrupts the stability and consistency of care for the children who need it most.

As an MLA, I have seen loving foster homes closed when relationships between the department and foster parents break down due to consistent miscommunication and erratic, sometimes seemingly irrational, decision-making. I have also seen foster parents give up, telling me they could no longer continue because they felt like they were being treated like criminals. Others say that while they continue to struggle out of love for their children, they are exhausted by the constant anxiety and fear that they live with every day. They have nowhere to turn, and even when they come forward they worry that could lead to serious repercussions and reprisals from the very government and system that has guardianship over the children they care so much about.

For example, just before the holidays a foster family told me their home was closed on Christmas Eve, and the children were placed with a family member that those children had never met. It was hard not to connect with the situation that had just happened to them weeks before. One of their very young foster children was gravely ill and a close family member of the foster parent traveled to Alberta after the child was medivaced, hoping to comfort them while the foster parent cared for other children. Child and family services forced that family member out of the hospital room, threatening to call police on them, even though the biological family had pleaded to CFS to allow their presence at the child's bedside. So they spoke up, Mr. Speaker, and shortly thereafter their home was closed. Just after leaving intensive care and right before opening their Christmas presents, that child was sent to a new home with no transition plan. The foster family was heartbroken and the biological family was furious. They had trusted the foster family, yet no one had asked them or even notified them of the move of their children.

In many such cases where foster parents are removed, the Minister tells us the rights of the biological family are paramount but here those rights were completely ignored.

Around the same time, I was advocating for another family whose home had been closed. All they wanted to see was the children they had cared for over so many years during

the -- they wanted to see them over the holidays. At first, we were hopeful this could be arranged since the desire for the children to remain in contact with their foster parents had been made clear. But it, sadly, never happened. This came after years of agonizing relationships with child and family services who repeatedly stopped and restarted plans to transition the children back to their home community while the family begged the department to simply make a decision for the sake of the children's stability. Ultimately, it was decided that the children's health and safety could not be guaranteed at home. Yet last year, after worsening of miscommunication and deteriorating relationships with CFS, the children were suddenly removed and sent to the very home that had been previously deemed unsafe.

Stories like these, Mr. Speaker, are all too common. Speaking up for respect, consistency, or the well-being of children in care seem to result in closed homes, intrusive investigations, and deeply personal accusations. There are countless more examples I could share that both biological and foster families are often too afraid to speak out. Even when they raise concerns, they are told they are breaching confidentiality even though they are only escalating matters within the exact same department.

I have never seen so many consistent trends with such similar concerns at such a high volume, Mr. Speaker. Foster parents ignored, biological families ignored, adoptions completely stalled, children left in perpetual care until they age out of the system. That is called legal limbo, Mr. Speaker. And even though the idea to insist that children be reunited with their biological families comes from a place of good intentions, there's only one of the rights of children that has to be factored in when looking, again, at that word balance. We need to make sure children are in safe, stable homes. We need to make sure children have access to their rights, to their culture, to their families, but all those things have to come together, not one placed over the other, and that is what's happening right now. Too often the department will not allow these children to settle and be in loving homes due to political considerations seemingly driven by policies that aren't written down anywhere and aren't communicated to foster families and biological parents.

As legal guardian, the department renders these children unrepresentable to us as MLAs while both foster and biological families feel like they're being treated as afterthoughts, and it's hard to argue with those feelings based on the evidence.

In all these cases, a child and youth advocate could have brought all parties together to reach a resolution. This office would have also provided clear, objective recommendations for systemic change to prevent these situations from ever happening again. Instead, it falls to politicians, to Ministers, and the Minister in particular considers us too political to act as advocates for these families and for these children. So then it falls to the courts but they cannot set precedent due to confidentiality restrictions. And accessing courts requires money, lawyers, and are prohibitively expensive for most working families in the Northwest Territories, especially hardworking foster families who are giving a lot of their time and resources to support children in care. It is no wonder our constituents turn to the idea of an advocate office, and indeed an actual advocate office in our sister territory of Yukon.

As a parent, I cannot imagine my own kids being shuffled between homes based on the political whims of a government, with the department deciding which rights align with its agenda. As a Northerner, I cannot sit by while foster homes and social workers are lost because this work is so confrontational, so disorganized, so disheartening, so disorganized again.

The solution is establishing an independent child and youth advocate that is rooted in evidence-based decision-making. This will not be confrontational to staff or the system because it complements their work and provides the oversight they need to perform at their best. It is not a political office because it is work that is grounded in children's rights and offers objective solutions to the entire Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this work has waited for far too long. We are the last jurisdiction in Canada. As I said before, every other province and territory has come to the conclusion that they need a dedicated Office of a Child and Youth Advocate. How that office works, where it fits into the greater government organization, or indeed statutory offices, is irrelevant to the fact that these services exist. Even our sister territory of Nunavut, who has very similar operating challenges and legal structures due to us once being a united territory, they have established this office and they fund it even in excess of what the resources in the Yukon have. That's what we learned when we met with the Yukon child and family advocate. This is important, and it's crucially important to Indigenous people in care.

As an MLA, I have been through one audit of child and family services, and I may go through another one in my time in this Assembly. And I

will tell you it is shocking to see the stories that come out of these audits. And my commentary on this motion is largely focused on child and family services and the system of placing children in care of the government because those are the most heartbreaking, heart-wrenching stories, and those kids need the most support. Indeed, this office will support all children and youth in the Northwest Territories, not even the most dire cases but all cases. And it's going to reveal things that we never even thought of as a government.

That is the other value of this office, is that young people will have someone to go to, to share their opinion, to comment on decisions that are being made. And when you think of the amazing work young people have done in advancing climate change, in talking about generational fairness, indeed in pushing politicians out of their comfort zones to listen and to change, we see entire regimes of corrupt governments collapse under the weight of Gen Z protests. It's called something now, the Gen Z protests. Young people can move mountains, but we need to give them a system that allows them to have a voice that's heard. And this office will do that.

And perhaps most importantly, for all those parents, both biological, foster parents, and the kids themselves in the system, who are working tirelessly to provide a loving home for kids in desperate circumstances and for kids who are being shuffled around in perpetual limbo, that needs to come to an end. And the best way to do that, to advocate for these kids and make sure that mistakes aren't being made, and indeed the best interests of the child are maintained at every level of the system, we need an independent body of oversight to do that, because it just simply does not exist right now.

I look forward to the debate from my colleagues. Again, this has been going on for many Assemblies, many years. We have an opportunity to change that today.

You will note, Mr. Speaker, this motion doesn't ask for the government's response. We don't need 120 days for an answer. We need that answer today. We're over -- we're engaged in a budget process right now. There's money to be spent. We can make this possible. We can end the story of this long saga of the child and family service -- sorry, child and youth advocate -- so many acronyms. We can end the saga, write the final chapter, and bring about this office. Not today, obviously, but we can make that decision today as an Assembly, and we can give children and youth the voice they so desperately need in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Colleagues, I know this is a really sensitive matter. Please try to do the debate and try not to bring in certain situations because people in the Northwest Territories, we're small, so please be aware of that. To the motion. Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to express my wholehearted support for this motion. You know, I just want to say that we debate a lot of motions on the floor of this House. This one, for me, is different, and I do want to emphasize that to my Cabinet colleagues. It's different for me in that this is one that I would and was considering bringing forward myself. I think it's irrelevant who brings it forward. The point is that it's on the floor. Here we are debating it. I support it.

Mr. Speaker, this is an issue which my colleague noted has been raised by many Members of this Assembly and past Members. Notably, the current Member for Kam Lake raised this issue when she was a regular MLA, and my Frame Lake predecessor, Mr. Kevin O'Reilly, who I want to refer to here because he spoke a lot in favour of this -- and I just want to note that those words are still relevant today because we still don't have a child and youth advocate. Mr. O'Reilly noted that this -- as of 2022, this issue had been raised almost 900 times in the House since 2003. He himself has raised it a bunch of those times.

Mr. Speaker, he noted that the offices of child and youth advocacy are commonplace in Canada. In fact, as noted by the Member for Range Lake, we are the only jurisdiction in Canada that does not have a child and youth advocate. When the child and youth advocate from the Yukon presented to us earlier this week and we met with her, that really stood out to me, that we have this Association of Child and Youth Advocates of Canada and NWT sticks out as a sore thumb as the only jurisdiction that isn't a member of that association because we don't have a child and youth advocate.

Mr. Speaker, I can't emphasize enough that this has been a very long time coming, MLAs have been fighting for it for a long time, and I think it's time for the NWT to finally catch up.

Mr. Speaker, at the time that Mr. O'Reilly raised the issue in 2022, he noted that the department was looking actively at options for establishment of that role. He had been reassured a jurisdictional scan was underway. Members were told that we were looking at proposed models. The unique circumstances of the NWT needed to be analyzed both in terms of national changes in child welfare and to

address the need to build and share accountability with Indigenous governments. All of that work was needed now more than ever in light of the 2018 auditor general's report on child and family services and subsequent recommendations from Indigenous governments and key stakeholders. As he noted in 2022, we were no closer to creation of an advocate and, unfortunately, here we are in 2026 and it feels like we are still no closer to creation of an advocate though I hope that today is the turning point.

Mr. O'Reilly closed his statement in noting that in light of other jurisdictions' successes and his work with constituents seeking the authority of an arm's length child and youth advocate is that the time for a child and youth advocate is now. He said those words in 2022. As the new MLA for Frame Lake, I repeat those words today. The time is now.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Member for Range Lake bringing forward the motion spoke to it quite extensively, so I don't want to repeat those words. I don't want to repeat the things he'd been saying. I note that this is something that I was talking behind the scenes with the ombud about and looking as to whether that service could potentially include this. The ombud is a very busy office right now, and I think something that I would emphasize is that, again, we are the only jurisdiction that doesn't have a dedicated child and youth advocate, and I really do think that the best model is the model that exists in all the other jurisdictions. It's a tried and true model. It's something that the NWT is an outlier in not having. And so I really encourage the government to look at that model and implement that model. We have talked about this more than enough. And so I am not going to talk about it much more because I think the statements that are in Hansard already from many Members of this Assembly, including at least one Member of our current Cabinet, many Members in past sittings and past Assemblies have raised this issue, so there's more than enough in Hansard, as Mr. O'Reilly raised 900 times, Mr. Speaker. We don't need more talk about this. The work just needs to get done.

Mr. Speaker, typically a government's response to motions involves an explanation of ongoing work and tends to detail reasons why the requested action won't be taken at this time for such and such reasons and different justifications. I want to emphasize, again to my Cabinet colleagues -- I hope you're paying attention -- this is not a motion I will be accepting a no for in response. I am just going to pause on that.

I really want to emphasize that, that the time has come to finally take action. How many

Assemblies need to say it? How many motions need to pass on the floor? How many speeches do we need to make before we finally put the NWT in the position of not being the only jurisdiction of Canada without a child and youth advocate? That's all I can really say on this, Mr. Speaker. I hope Cabinet takes this seriously this time. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. To the motion. Member for Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Mr. Speaker, thank you. Mr. Speaker, I second it and support this motion to see positive change. I advocated and talked countless times in this House about improving the system, strengthening the system. We need to find ways of helping and working with the children and youth in care. In the process, work with the families. We know many of the descendants -- many of the children in care are descendants of the residential school survivors.

Mr. Speaker, we are in a crisis situation. We have said it many times. Families and children do need help. At this time, there are over 90 percent of children that are in care are Indigenous in the NWT. Mr. Speaker, how many of these children are permanent care? How many of them have reunited with the families? How many of the children have aged out of the system? And all through the years we never had an advocate.

Mr. Speaker, we need to find ways of helping and working with the children and their families. The advocate office will help in the process. This support is greatly needed in all of the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, we know that when the children are small, they are easy to work with, to deal with, but once they become teenagers, for many it is difficult. It becomes -- it's difficult for the youth and it becomes difficult for the foster parents. So as a result, we see places like home-based programs. They step in. They take over from where the child and family services have failed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Monfwi. To the motion. Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to my colleague from Range Lake for bringing this forward today.

So I want to differ slightly on some comments from my colleague from Frame Lake. Across Canada it's not always an independent child and youth advocate office. In Quebec, the function is within the Human Rights Commission. And in Ontario and Nova Scotia, the oversight of children and youth are in the

ombud's office. And as the Member for Frame Lake earlier said, there has been work done in the previous few months from some Members to look into what a middle path might look like to have this function sit within the ombud's office.

I appreciate the broadness of scope that the motion speaks to. I appreciate that the Member for Range Lake is very passionate about this. As he knows, I have dealt with similar situations. He detailed them, and I don't wish to speak to them again as you have cautioned, Mr. Speaker.

So over the last few months, this middle path does appeal to me. I have spoken to Cabinet colleagues about it. I believe that there are low-cost, high-impact solutions that exist, but I will still support this motion today as trying all tools in the toolbox, and I recognize that it would be -- to steal a term from the Member for Monfwi, I believe was a Cadillac solution, or was it -- at any rate, I think it would be the best solution that Members are looking for. I think this is something that cannot be ignored, that must be taken seriously in the life of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker. And that's where I will leave it today. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Great Slave. To the motion. Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Mr. Speaker, I do support this motion, but first I want to step back and acknowledge that this is a very difficult subject and that the weight of history is heavy. Who has the right to decide what's best for anyone's children, especially what's best for Indigenous children? Who has the right to even stand up and talk about what's in the best interest of Indigenous children?

We know that throughout history, and even today, we've had settlers to this place stepping in and deciding what is best for Indigenous children, forcing those decisions through with violence and incredible harm to children, families, and communities. Children have long been pawns in power struggles, in bigger political struggles, and we have to do everything we can to stop that and break that cycle. So how? How do we stop children from being pawns and used for other people's interests?

We speak often in this House about the United Nations, about universal rights, principles that all humans around the world can agree upon, and one of those is that children matter. Children do have rights. Decisions about children must prioritize the best interests of the children first and foremost. And that doesn't

mean that the child gets to be the boss and order everybody around and get everything that they want. Children have to respect their elders, and that's true not only in Indigenous cultures but pretty much in all of our families.

So one of the objections I have heard to establishing an NWT child and youth advocate in the past has been that it would be more appropriate for this to be led by Indigenous governments, for there to be a separate advocate for each region, even each community, that it should be led by each community and not by us, the GNWT. However, we also know that the current reality is that there are very many children, especially Indigenous children, currently in the care of the GNWT. I think everyone's long-term vision and aspiration is that this would stop being the case, that we would move towards a system where each Indigenous government potentially taking over child protection, family preservation, all of those things. We're not there yet, and I don't think we see that child protection will be taken over by Indigenous governments even in the near future. So what do we do now?

I think it is a good step to start with a territorial-wide child and youth advocate office. I think there are many ways this could be done in partnership with local communities, local Indigenous governments, to make sure that this is not something that railroads over what communities want but that everyone is actually working together to work for the best interests of the children, especially children that are in the care of this government, essentially.

I do carry a lot of concern that the status quo is that the director of child and family services holds extraordinary power and decision-making power over the lives of a lot of children, and we need more mechanisms and checks and balances to ensure that that power and that those decisions always put at the centre the best interests of the children.

I do want to say, too, I think we always need to discuss this issue with humility, with compassion for everybody involved, everyone involved, especially in the CFS system, everyone working in the system. But what I understand from other child and youth advocate offices across the country is that they are there to try to bring people together, to try to find solutions, to try to mediate where possible, and not to simply sort of finger point and shame and blame. I think there's also a lot of skepticism, and perhaps this is what has blocked this initiative in the past, that would this really make any difference. Do we need another office, more staff people assigned to, you know, fill out forms and check boxes and, you know, write reports? Is that going to really make a

difference in the lives of children? I think the short answer is it can as long as the staff working in this kind of advocate office are passionate and dedicated and want to make a difference.

Now, I think there's a number of ways this could happen, ways that we could do this, and that there can be ways to work with the existing ombud office to expand its potential to advocate and work for the best interests of children and youth. I do know that there is a lot of dedication and passion within the ombud's office for serving children and youth. And that's huge. So I think this is the time to build on that and use that passion and dedication to make a real difference.

So in conclusion, do I think that establishing some sort of office or sort of bureaucratic process is the magic bullet? Is it the one solution? Of course not. There are very few magic bullets in the world. I do think it's an important start because the status quo is not working. I also want to acknowledge we desperately and urgently need changes to our Child and Family Services Act, and I do hope that's coming soon in this Assembly. There's a number of other work that we need to do. I think pretty much people at every level, organizations at every level in our communities, in our government, have a part to play, but this is an important start and so I do support this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Yellowknife Knife North. To the motion. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A motion like this kind of gives you a pause and it gives you pause by asking yourself, like, why don't we begin at the end and hopefully we'll meet there somewhere. What do we envision?

Some of us envision that youth are being advocated for, someone's standing there listening to their voice, someone's sitting there going through their story, someone's understanding the struggle this young person may be having, and they're able to tell this story in a way that the system cannot. I think it's important, and no one's said it yet, but it's important that we should take another pause as we work towards the end of this narrative by saying it's not that anyone here is saying the system sucks. We're just saying it's less effective and we think there's a more effective way to do that.

Now, I don't know what the NWT government knows that ten provinces and two territories don't see. I don't know, maybe they see something none of us can see. But I can tell you

that often I hear when it comes to doing something it'll always start with well, who does it? How do they do it? Why do they do it? Prove it to us. Where's the facts? I haven't seen enough facts. Those facts aren't good enough. They're not my facts. And on and on and on.

Mr. Speaker, it's not that the system isn't trying. It's just it's been proven in ten provinces and two territories to be more effective when it comes to sharing the concerns, the struggles, caring for, and making sure the youth and child advocate voices go heard. Now what would they do?

Now I am going to be clear. I am not your champion to further bloat government. I think jobs are important. I do. And I think rules are important. But just to give a blank cheque, no. But I'd say this: This isn't going to bloat the government. This is one of those offices that when we turn around and say why didn't we do it sooner? What held us back?

Well, let's think about what it does in a different way. Could you imagine someone in the current system investigating themselves through the process? No. And, again, these aren't bad people, I am just saying it's less effective. Can you imagine them investigating and creating reports of the system, how the system isn't working? It doesn't work that way. Could you imagine them in the same office doing reviews of their process on the files? Not the same way.

Mr. Speaker, could you imagine them monitoring the effectiveness of these placements? We've heard passionate stories from the MLA for Range Lake about young people bouncing and bouncing and bouncing. The same stories told by the MLA for Monfwi, young people bouncing so continuous that they finally bounce out of the system when they become no one else's problem. So I'd like to say, back to imagine thinking of the end. Can we get there?

Absolutely. We have a budget process. We're doing it now. We have Members, hopefully all of us, say yes, this matters. We could have the Minister at this very moment say I have to declare we're going to do this. That would kill the debate. Everyone would be in tears. We'd be throwing paper in the air and like, woohoo. You feel like you've done something meaningful.

Now, again, imagine -- I know it's hard for some people and there's a little bit of humour in this but it's true. Some of us haven't been a young person for a long time. Now I am not saying anyone here has a birth certificate that says British North America. There might be somebody in Cabinet or two, but. But the truth

be told, Mr. Speaker, could you imagine your voice if you were a young person -- and I am speaking to the Members and the Ministers, and even you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone in this room is listening. Could you imagine being a young person and no one's representing your story, your struggle?

The system is engaged to be the system. And that's the challenge there. They have guardrails and processes, and they time in on the clock. They time out of the clock. They drive the government vehicle there. They, you know, process everything government-wise. What it misses is that deep-rooted connection these offices have, these advocates have, for the cause. And, again, I want to underscore this is not a strike in any way about who's working there. It's just different. And so those stories are shared.

Now let's talk about different stories, the stories of young people with fear, without love, maybe hunger, maybe stress, maybe trauma, maybe not even knowing what the future holds. And that advocate would represent that and ten times more, to make sure that those voices don't get lost, they don't go silent with the wind. We often talk about how important the vulnerable are, and I worry sometimes we've spoken the words and we're not listening to them.

This motion is not a strike against the system. It's saying how we can improve the system. And I finish by saying, once again, ten provinces, two territories, what do they know that we don't? I think it's time we ask them what do they know we don't? And I think it's time for us to connect with that problem. Because if we could lead it to a better way and make the life better for one child, then maybe two, maybe three or four youth, it just builds. And, Mr. Speaker, that then begs the very question if we're not doing things like this, then why are we even here? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. To the motion. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member from Range Lake who moved this motion, created the motion, as well as the Member from Monfwi. I won't reiterate all the passionate and eloquent things that have been said on this motion. Simply to say, Mr. Speaker, as a leader, as a legislator, as a father, I strongly support this motion, and I would hope that everybody in this building will do the same. Thank you.

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

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too will be supporting this motion. As a Member of this circular community, it's actually the right thing to do. As a residential school survivor, and everybody in this House here being children in some way or another, maybe some not so out it, but the experience of the children that we serve, Mr. Speaker, it's our fiduciary obligation as parents, grandparents, uncles, nieces, nephews, to do what's best for the society and not kick the can down the road 900 times. And it's also our fiduciary obligation to show leadership and build our society. We've got huge problems out there in smaller communities. I see it frequently. And to establish and strengthen our communities, we use words like it's the best pillar for the community. As I mentioned, this is the right thing to do and to send a message to the parents that we have the best interests of your child, and we've made that decision. And we talk about our budget deliberations, and when I sit on this side, I count the votes to nine. We can sincerely make a difference. Maybe it should be thought on utilizing that in the remaining days we have, Mr. Speaker, because it's the right thing to do. I can't emphasize enough. And I only can imagine the children in these smaller communities living in, to some degree, impoverished conditions. And it's quite shocking at times to visualize what you've seen. And now we are at the threshold of making a decision in favour of this motion because it's the right thing to do. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. To the motion. Member from Dehcho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When this first came up, I was very -- I guess you could say I was concerned about it because in some ways, as a family member, as a mother, and looking at the way things happen, and my colleagues talked about residential school, how things worked out for a lot of people in our communities, I was saddened to think that responsibility for families' needs to come from the parents; however, in most cases, in a lot of cases, there's children in our communities that, for whatever reason, are put in care. Either parents died or passed away or something happened and the child ended up in care. And so one of my colleagues also mentioned that we're raised to -- children have to respect the elders. We need to be going down that kind of road with children. However, this came about, and it kind of made me think about it because I really don't want another organization or entity that needs to be looking after our children. Me, as a parent, I need to

look after my children. I need to do that. However, like I said before, for whatever reason our children end up in care. And I too had to deal with a young lady that a child was put in care. She was struggling to try to get her kid back. So I see how this process could help her. I see how it could help her to close that gap. She was trying to clean up her life, get things organized for herself, doing the best she could. And I see how this could help her because the system in place was trying to push her away from her child. And that is not the way things should go. So I too had to think about this, so I need to be supporting this with my colleagues to say that and to have this process -- to look at this process, how it will work out. I would like this process to be developed for the Northwest Territories, by the people of the Northwest Territories, not just somebody else's views that come in and tell us again how we're supposed to live. So having said that, I will be supporting the motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the mover and the seconder of the motion for highlighting the importance of ensuring that children and youth and families who interact with the child and family services system have access to meaningful avenues for support, feedback, and recourse.

Mr. Speaker, the well-being of children and youth is a priority for this government and we do remain committed to strengthening transparency, accountability, responsiveness to our system. This motion proposes an establishment of an independent Office of Child and Youth Advocate as a statutory officer of this Legislative Assembly. The advocate could possibly extend beyond child and family services, encompassing other services for children, such as justice, education, health; therefore, before determining the most effective pathway forward, the GNWT would need to undertake a comprehensive analysis of all of our current mechanisms that we do have within all of those different authorities. This work will help us understand where the gaps are. If there is opportunity to expand on existing processes to meet these needs and if such, an office is set up.

What the appropriate focus could and should be, at present, there are several processes available to children and youth and families and caregivers. We do include internal complaints resolutions, opportunities for reviews by administrative decisions by the statutory director, reviews of the quality, service, and

compliance and standards of practice, and the ability of clients to bring concerns forward in broader oversight bodies such as the Office of the Ombud, as the Member had said in his statement.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that these processes may not meet the needs or the expectations of children and youth, particularly when navigating our complex systems during challenging times. We also acknowledge that some voices, especially those of young people, may still feel unheard or youth may still be unsure of where to turn when they have concerns. For these reasons, we will proceed with a thorough assessment of all existing oversight and complaint pathways. This will help us determine whether establishing a statutory child and youth advocate is the best approach or whether enhancement to other existing structures could achieve the same or better outcome for young people. And we are committed to ensuring that any future model is designed to be effective, accessible, and responsive to the unique needs of the Northwest Territories children and youth.

As many members have said in this House, these are Indigenous children and youth in care, and we need Indigenous voices at the table to be able to help us make these decisions. So once this analysis is complete, we will report back to the Assembly on our findings and propose a next step.

Mr. Speaker, as this motion makes recommendations to government and Cabinet, we will be abstaining from this vote. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Inuvik Twin Lakes. To the motion. Member from Range Lake, to conclude the debate.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, thank you to all my colleagues who spoke to this motion very passionately with very moving testimonials as to the importance of this motion. And thank you to the Minister for laying out the government's position on this.

I want to quote from my colleague from Frame Lake where he said the ombud is very busy right now. The ombud office, one, that is about administrative fairness, as I said, so it's not dedicated to advocacy of any particular person or segment of society. It is about making sure the government is doing the right thing based on its own policies. Very different from an advocacy office. But, Mr. Speaker, that debate itself followed a very similar course through this Assembly to establish the Office of the Ombud. My friend from Yellowknife Centre was in the 17th Assembly when the decision was made. It

took the 18th Assembly to make it, which you and I served in, Mr. Speaker, and there was pushback at that time as well. And the argument then was we don't need an ombud; we have MLAs. Or we don't need an ombud; we have other independent things. It's just a waste of money and time when we've got all these other complicated government systems and politicians in place.

Now we have an ombud, and it's busy. It's very busy, Mr. Speaker. It's a growing office. Because the idea of independent oversight is a compelling idea. It is a fundamental concept for a democratic society. And when you add more transparency to society -- this is a proven fact -- you improve outcomes. You improve even GDP. You improve every element of that society.

So this is not just about having another complaint box. Far from it. This is about ensuring we have effective oversight of a government service that has profound power over the lives of people who have no voice in society. Not only do they have no voice in society, but they have no voice inside the system that they're in. So, Mr. Speaker, that's why this is so important. Members have clearly indicated that support.

I did want to comment on the system itself and those who work in it. We have many hard-working social workers, and I know they care. And this is not an indictment, or the comments made, the speeches made today are not -- the debates are not an indictment of any particular worker. I believe firmly that you need to blame the problem, not the person. And if you are a part of a system that's not working, you can't hope to fix it from the inside out. You need a systemic solution to a systemic problem. And the system, not to disagree with my colleague from the Yellowknife Centre, but after two scathing auditor general reports, most reasonable people do, in fact, think that this system does, in fact, suck. And the efforts of the system to self-correct have left children and parents wanting. And clearly, we need to try something else.

I also want to thank the Members, our honourable colleagues, who are residential school survivors who told their story and they shared their experience. It was moving and cut straight to the heart of this motion. I sincerely thank all of you for sharing those stories and reminding us of our shared responsibility towards reconciliation, that we need to do more than what we're doing. We need to do everything in our power, and that includes taking bold steps in the right direction.

To the idea of more studies -- and I will end with this, Mr. Speaker -- we don't need any more studies. You've had 900 words, plus what we've added in this Assembly, of people talking about this office. You've had plenty of time to study. You have had plenty of time to assess it. And in the past, you've had plenty of time to say no. Now is the time to say yes. I can help you with your assessment. Do it. Because what we have now is not working.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Sahtu framed this perfectly. It's time to do the right thing. So I call on this government to do the right thing, because the buck stops with us. And as a father as well, when I look into the face of my children, I can't imagine what it would be like to be separated from them but if I was, I would want to know that the systems that ensure their safety and their well-being, are in fact intact and not shrouded with secrecy with no advocacy. That's what this motion is about. It's about children in the Northwest Territories. It's about parents. It's about families. It's about the most vulnerable people in society. And I thank my colleagues who have spoken to support. And I hope, I hope, that we will all do the right thing and bring this office into existence. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question has been called. All those in favour.

**MR. TESTART:** I would ask for a recorded vote, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### RECORDED VOTE

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr Harjot Sidhu):** The Member for the Dehcho. 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 Yellowknife North.

**MR. SPEAKER:** All those opposed, please stand. All those abstaining, please stand.

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr Harjot Sidhu):** The Member for Thebacha. The Member for Yellowknife South. The Member for Kam Lake. The Member for Hay River North. The Member for Hay River South. The Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. The Member for Nunakput.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Colleagues, recorded vote, nine in favour, zero opposed, seven abstentions. The motion is carried.

---Carried

Motions. Returns to oral questions. Acknowledgements. Colleagues, recognizing the time and that we have an hour in question period, we will take a brief break.

---SHORT RECESS

**MR. SPEAKER:** Oral questions. Written questions. Member from Frame Lake.

#### Oral Questions

##### QUESTION 1101-20(1): MIDWIFERY SERVICES

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on February 6th in Committee of the Whole, the health Minister's staff clarified that health system investment funding was being repurposed to explore traditional birth works. Can the Minister expand on that for the Assembly and help us better understand the planned use of this funding? Will it be used to help expand midwifery services in the NWT? Thank you.

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

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, My department is working with ISC to look at repurposing the funding to explore traditional birth works, and this could potentially include traditional knowledge healing, Indigenous birth work education, and perinatal resources. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister just be -- the Minister gave a fairly broad response there. Can the Minister be a bit more clear? I mean, will the funding be used to explore -- sorry, I don't want to ask the same question twice. But will the funding be used towards looking into whether midwifery can be expanded in the territory? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, midwifery within the Northwest Territories, as the Member is aware, is in Hay River and Fort Smith. The two programs there, Fort Smith is fully staffed right now; Hay River still have, I think, vacancies there; however, they're being filled with casuals in ensuring that that program is sustained. So where we are working right now is the work plan. The work that's being done on the birth

works is more of the Indigenous perspective on Indigenous birth midwifery and being able to provide resources in the smaller communities for perinatal and getting that traditional knowledge in that area. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I am happy to hear that from the Minister. And just on behalf of my constituents, I would note that midwives are a great resource for doing the work that she just referenced.

So, Mr. Speaker, in answer to questions about midwifery recently, the Minister mentioned that there has been difficulty staffing physicians in communities. Many births these days are high risks and might not be able to be done within a community. Is the health department investigating how midwifery services could be incorporated into our system, considering these challenges? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one of the areas -- so to that question, the work that's going on is we have a working group. So between the -- like, there's an advisory committee, and they're working together for this work plan. One of the areas is the programs foundation to midwifery care in the territory must be supported to ensure that they can meet the community needs but also remain attractive workplaces for midwives. The other thing in a lot of these smaller communities is midwives need to be able to have so many births a year, like to be able to -- and the majority of the people coming from these small communities are choosing to travel into the birthing centres. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1102-20(1):  
JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE FUNDING

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on the news today, I am sure it'll be no surprise to the Minister of ECE, that \$1.55 billion is rolling forward on the Jordan's Principle money. So I guess maybe let's start with the easy questions. What does the department of education know about the money as in how much money is coming, when it'll be flowing specifically, and will it have any impact on the backstop that the GNWT has provided already? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we were in this House when the press conference took place with Minister Gull-Masty. I do have the news release from ISC up in front of me, and it's about five sentences. So it does lay out the \$1.5 billion for -- or to renew Jordan's Principle funding until March 31st of 2027. The finer details of what this means for the Northwest Territories I do not have, but I've asked the deputy minister of education, culture and employment to please reach out to his counterpart within the federal government. Thank you.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess just to clarify, I believe if memory serves -- and I am sure it's the right amount per se -- but I think \$14 million was passed in the last supp. The issue ultimately comes down to is that when the NWT government eventually gets its portion, can the Minister ensure or guarantee, I guess in some form, that there won't be any clawback of that money? So in other words, all money passed for JP money plus the new one will just help support and augment and further meet the needs of First Nations kids and our communities. Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the dollars for Jordan's Principle have not come to the Government of the Northwest Territories. They have gone to school boards through direct agreements with the federal government and the education body themselves. Through the support assistant initiative that this government put forward for the 2025-2026 school year, we had indicated to education bodies right from the beginning that they still had to apply for Jordan's Principle and should their application to Jordan's Principle be successful, that we would then settle up at the end of the year but that we would be there to support their need for their support assistant in the meantime. Thank you.

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

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the fact that the Minister pointed out the application process. As well as that is, it's challenging to find the staff to meet that. So, Mr. Speaker, if staff are not available to meet that, how is the department going to work with the system to ensure that we have enough people to respond to this need so that Jordan's

Principle money gets spent in the appropriate way and on the ground to support the kids, noting that we are struggling to staff these positions for this support? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the school boards have traditionally used their resources to apply for funding. They have also worked with families. They have also worked with healthcare providers in order to access this funding and to be able to complete the applications and submit them to the federal government. That money has then flowed traditionally straight from the federal government to the education body for the service that they are looking to provide. And should an education body not be successful going forward still within this school year for their Jordan's Principle application, their application that they have with education, culture and employment would still continue to stand. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1103-20(1):  
CANADIAN INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH  
INFORMATION

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, earlier today I mentioned the Canadian Institute for Health Information reporting relationship with the emergency room data for the NWT Health and Social Services Authority and the fact that there is none. So my question for the health Minister is, the Yukon mandates emergency department reporting to CIHI and submits roughly 41,000 records a year. Can the Minister confirm that the NWT submits zero? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what we mandate, the coding to CIHI is inpatient surgical and day procedures; however, we do have the data for the emergency room. It's, you know, that they've had to prioritize those mandated areas that they submit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On January 15th, the Minister wrote that NWT -- to my office that the NWT, quote, provides data to CIHI as part of their standardized national reporting programs. She did not disclose that all emergency department reporting is absent, and now we know that they have that information.

Was she unaware of this at the time, or did she just choose not to disclose it? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wasn't aware. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. CIHI's expert panel recommends every jurisdiction mandate NACRS reporting. That's reporting to the National Ambulatory Care Reporting System, the uninitiated. What is the Minister's plan and what is her timeline to catch up to this national standard? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And as I have mentioned many times in this House, we have the data. In order to prioritize this, you know, we would need extra staff to keep up to the amount of data that we have to manually track and submit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1104-20(1):  
HOUSING IN INUVIK

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions aren't on curling today; my questions are for the Minister of Housing NWT.

Mr. Speaker, with the continued shortage of homes in Inuvik, with the long waitlist still at the LHO there, and with of course the funding that was approved last year in the budget, can the Minister update on any plans currently in place for Inuvik with our new builds up there? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Inuvik Boot Lake. Minister responsible for Housing NWT.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Member for the question. It's important to update this House on the development of the \$150 million allocation for the Northwest Territories. Housing NWT is advancing public housing development in Inuvik. Currently, this includes a 20-unit modular development on the Blueberry Patch site. These 20 units will be configured as five four-plexes for singles. A design-build contract has been awarded to ARCAN Construction with modular production by Metcan Building Solutions in Hay River. Site development activities will begin this summer, and site services, including the utilidor, will be coordinated with the Town of Inuvik and

adjacent properties to ensure optimization. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister. That is, indeed, excellent news. I am sure the residents will feel the same.

Beyond that project, which again is a significant project, does the Housing NWT have any additional future plans beyond that once that project is complete, and as the Minister says, on the Blueberry Patch? Thank you.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're happy to report that housing has been in discussions with Canada, CMHC, on future opportunities for Inuvik, and we look forward to having an announcement shortly that will include more units for Inuvik and the Blueberry Patch. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Final supplementary.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, again, thank you for that great news. Certainly desperately needed.

My final question, Mr. Speaker, part of that funding as well was for M&I funding for repairs and maintenance, which, again, was desperately needed in our community as many others. Can the Minister update on how the M&I funding has been rolling out and how we're proceeding with our repairs and maintenance up there as well? Thank you.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of the \$150 million contribution, \$30 million of that fund went towards modernization and improvements and also deferred maintenance. And for Inuvik, what we've done to date is \$728,000 in completed major repairs on seven housing units, \$454,000 in completed deferred maintenance, \$117,000 in minor repairs. These are repairs beyond what the LHO had in terms of a budget. And for this 2026-2027 budget, we have \$454,000 in complete deferred maintenance and \$955,000 in minor repairs. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1105-20(1):

TRANSBOUNDARY WATER AGREEMENTS

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Mr. Speaker, in GNWT executive council policy 53.02, sustainable development, one of the stated principles is that natural resources should be managed so that opportunities for future resource uses are maximized and maintenance of ecosystems is ensured. My question is, is it the Minister's position that our existing transboundary agreements with neighboring upstream jurisdictions allow for the GNWT to effectively meet the intent of this principle should effluent wastewater be released in those upstream jurisdictions? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Great Slave. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

**HON. JAY MACDONALD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the Minister responsible for the sustainable development policy, I am fully committed and I fully stand behind and uphold the principles and the goals of this policy. And I think this is one of the key statements from the policy; it states that environmental conservation is essential to long-term economic prosperity. And, you know, as we look at that in the bigger picture, without development in the North, you know, that's one of the key tools that really contributes to our ability to meet those environmental goals and to achieve those conservation goals at the end of the day. The GNWT, and I, as Minister and the department, have stated in no uncertain terms that we are -- do not support the release of tailings -- treated tailings into the Athabasca River unless the information, data, and science demonstrates that it can be done without harming the ecological integrity of the NWT waters. And I just want to end by saying, you know, we work very closely with the Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations and our other partners in the North to ensure that we maintain that standard and we have a very strong message to all of the upstream jurisdictions in that regard. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, is it the Minister's position that ECC is taking adequate precautions to prevent or reduce both water quality and quantity threats to our watershed, both within the territory and from upstream jurisdictions, or are more robust protections required? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. JAY MACDONALD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can start off by saying I certainly share the concerns of the MLA and also the concerns of our Indigenous governments and our Indigenous organizations and the citizens of the territory when we talk about, you know, the potential impacts of the activity in the upstream jurisdictions. You know,

this is why we've negotiated and implemented our transboundary waters agreements. I think they're the key tool that we currently work with Alberta, British Columbia, and the Yukon. We're currently negotiating an agreement with Saskatchewan and, you know, we have this shared commitment to maintain the aquatic ecosystem health and additional environmental monitoring that needs to occur. The transboundary water agreements are what guide that ability to develop those water -- ensure that our quality and quantity has the objectives that we can use to develop the future management actions for the territory. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Final supplementary. Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister has mentioned that in the life of this Assembly we should see targeted updates to the waters regulations that will assist with clarity for resource development.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister speak to when the Assembly, not this one, but future Assemblies may anticipate substantive amendments to the Waters Act? Thank you.

**HON. JAY MACDONALD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think I've spoken to this a few times in this House and, you know, currently we're working through the first phase of a phased approach to the Act and the regulations, and phase one being the update to the regulations, and we're -- you know, every day we're getting a little bit closer to being able to bring those final results forward. It's very difficult to speak to what the 21st Assembly may do but we are committed to that three-phased approach, and the second phase we'll be looking at the Act and that work will take place in the next Assembly. There is still work going on in that regard but not at the specific large level because we're really focused on phase one of that approach. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife North.

QUESTION 1106-20(1):  
PRIMARY CARE FRAMEWORK

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to ask questions of the Minister of Health and Social Services following up on the statement and questions I was asking last week, I believe, about the work plan for the public administrator.

So the work plan states that the public administrator should be working with HSS and the NTHSSA to ensure effective implementation of primary care reform, starting in Yellowknife and reporting back on findings to inform work in other regions. And this work is marked as ongoing, and the deliverables are pretty vague.

So can the Minister explain what specific deliverables and timelines are expected from the public administrator around primary care reform in particular? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the final primary care framework has yet to be released. Deliverables will be dependent on this framework. In tandem with the primary care reform work, the PA worked on improving access to care closer to home in the Dehcho cabin community, so the team was busy in that area. And so we'll be looking to increase -- I believe the next phase is -- and as I mentioned, I believe they'll be starting the work in April on the patient journey in Yellowknife. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister actually give us any more detail on what is this primary care framework that is being worked on? What is a framework; what's the purpose of it? What's going to come out of this framework? I know we throw around a lot of jargon often about strategies and frameworks and plans but in this context, what is a primary care framework? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So as I think we released earlier -- oh, I can't remember -- the document that was released, this was the -- kind of the guide of how the framework was being designed. And so at this point, I would have to let the Member know that once the framework is completed and I am briefed, and then we go through the processes, I will be able to let the Member know more on what that framework is entitled. But from the comments that I've had, and, you know, and this House has brought up many times on team-based care and how people are being attached. There will be a document released shortly after that on how to attach the public to teams, and so there will be a guideline and that type of 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 what is the status of the promised public dashboard on the health authority website that was supposed to be charting progress on the work plan of the public administrator? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the work plan that was -- so the dashboard here, I believe that they were -- the NTHSSA launched a new online indicator dashboard in December that allowed the public to access information, interest in several areas. There has been some computer stuff to try and get the dashboard of the PA. However, I will follow up with the PA when I meet with him this week. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1107-20(1):  
THREE-PHASE POWER IN ENTERPRISE

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister of NTPC outline the timeline and specific steps that they're taking to advance the restoration of phase 3 power in the hamlet of Enterprise, given its importance to the community recovery and long-term economic stability? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Dehcho. Minister responsible for NTPC.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I did have an opportunity to make some inquiries on this question. It's come up a few times with the Northwest Territories Power Corporation. We don't own the line that runs from Hay River to Enterprise. That is owned and operated by Naka Power. It's my understanding that prior to the wildfires that there was what's called phase one power line running as far as Enterprise and that that is what Naka decided to rebuild. And at this point, I am not -- I have no ability to require or force them to do otherwise or to upgrade their power system.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly will maintain the commitment I made during COW which is that we'll work with the Member to connect her into Naka. I certainly do meet with them regularly in my role. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that.

What technical or infrastructure barriers, if any, is preventing phase 3 power to Enterprise, and what resources or support does the corporation need to move this forward without further delay? Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, again, I can't say why Naka may have chosen to maintain a phase 1 system as opposed to a phase 3 upgrade. In general, Mr. Speaker, seeking to increase energy infrastructure does obviously come with costs, and increasing the power line capacity would have, I expect, been at a higher cost level, and under typical utility systems, the costs are then borne by the customers or ratepayers. So it may well have been a balance of what funds were available, other than by influencing or impacting increased costs to ratepayers. So without an industrial consumer ready and able to bear some of those costs, that would then land on residents who certainly in the wildfire aftermath would have -- may have been very ill-placed to take those costs on. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for NTPC. Final supplementary. Member from the Dehcho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, without having phase 3 power, you can't do anything. You can't set up a business or anything. So how is NTPC working with the Hamlet of Enterprise and the government departments and federal partners to ensure that restoring phase 3 power becomes an immediate priority, aligning with the community rebuilding and future investment? Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And so, again, Mr. Speaker, they originally had only had phase 3. I think there had been -- or phase 1. I gather there had been some requests prior to the fires with some of the industrial developments in and around the region that there was a request to consider moving up to phase 3. That is not what Naka opted to install following the wildfires. So at present time, I haven't asked them to make that change. I could only do so by way of a request to Naka. It would be up to them. So, again, we do work with Naka on other things. We're working with them right now on integrated services planning and can certainly include some discussion of this with them in that respect. We are working together to do systems planning for the whole of the territory. So this is -- in that sense, may well be part of that discussion. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for NTPC. Oral questions. Member for Monfwi.

QUESTION 1108-20(1):  
MEDICAL TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a question for Minister of Health and Social Services. So I want to ask the Minister what specific financial supports are currently available to NWT residents who fall ill outside the territory and incur illness-related costs, such as extended accommodations -- accommodations or rebooked flights? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When NWT residents leave the territory for personal reasons, there is no cover from the government for those instances; however, across Canada, you know, as long as you have a current health care card, you will be able to access health services, any insured services, so hospital service to see a doctor and things like that. However, if you haven't been referred out of the territory by a practitioner from the Northwest Territories, then you're not considered on medical travel. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister explain why access to Larga accommodations is strictly tied to prior GNWT-approved medical travel even in cases where a resident experiences an unforeseen medical emergency while away? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when people leave the territory for personal reasons, they are not referred out of the territory therefore they're not a medical travel patient therefore they're not eligible to stay in Larga. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. Will the Minister consider creating a clear exception process for residents who become unexpectedly ill outside the Northwest Territories and face unavoidable costs related to that illness? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what we have done is that we have done some information -- I can share it with the Members. They can share it with their constituents. They can share it on their social media -- that when you're leaving the Northwest Territories and -- you know, if you were leaving the country, most people are -- always buy travel insurance but not necessarily when we leave to drive to Edmonton. Not -- people are not thinking that,

you know, certain things aren't covered. But when you're driving out of the territory or flying out of the territory and on personal reasons, then I would encourage people to buy travel insurance. That would help to cover the costs if an unexpected medical issue comes up. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1109-20(1):  
MIDWIFERY SERVICES

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just want to continue following up on the questions I was asking the health Minister earlier.

Mr. Speaker, as I had asked, considering people -- and the Minister pointed out, considering people are increasingly having to travel to regional centres to give birth from the communities, is the department working on a plan to ensure access to midwifery services in our hospitals? Thank you.

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

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Right now, the working group is meeting next month, and they are -- part of that work is to look at options of how to implement midwifery into our hospitals. We know that not just here but even in Inuvik, as a birthing hospital for instance, we struggle with obstetric nurses and so this work is happening right now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very encouraged to hear that and appreciate that from the Minister. I am really glad to hear that we have this working group going. I just note that the -- can the Minister give us any indication of how this is going to work? Can the Minister give any indication of staffing levels that they're looking for? What kind of timeline we can expect? I know that my constituents have been very clear with me that they want access to midwifery services in this community. Is the Minister working towards that goal? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have that level of detail right now, but what I can do is once the session is over, I will ask my department to brief me as to all of the work that has been going on in this area and, you know, I can meet with the Member after I have that briefing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1110-20(1):  
NURSE RETENTION

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When my colleague for Range Lake was asking questions regarding nurse retention yesterday, it got me wondering what the department of health is doing in collaboration with HR.

Mr. Speaker, we always talk about recruitment. Do we ever put enough time in retention? My question to the Minister of Health and Social Services is what is she doing specifically to retain nurses knowing that they can find better deals elsewhere? We need to find ways to keep them here. So what is she doing about it.

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

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services has a working group, and they have staff that are involved in the retention of staff. There are certain things that are going on within the department, and one of the other big pieces is within the health authority is training and mentorship, because we do have a lot of new staff, especially with us having the college and the nurses coming in. Our staff are feeling overwhelmed so to have dedicated staff to making sure that they are being supplemented to be able to support these new nurses and things. There's also other -- I know I have a list of them, but I don't have that detail at my fingertips. So I can share with the Members on that information. Thanks.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I will certainly accept that information. I am happy to read it and look through it.

Mr. Speaker, in many employment situations, they have what's called exit interviews. I understand that the territorial government does this in some cases. Not all cases are possible. I get that. So what the question really comes down to is what happens to that data through the exit interviews; where is it stored, who is it shared with, are there themes developed? And, you know, what type of transparency is brought into that data so we can talk about real challenges and real solutions? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. That was a little bit more than one question. Minister of Health and Social Services.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Yes, we do do exit interviews. The level of where those are done, I am not aware, but I know that when I was being briefed on coming up with the new -- you know, with the new people strategy, that that is one of the bigger areas where they are looking at, also from the town halls, also from the in-person meetings. And they've taken a lot of that information and tried to turn it into the new document that we should be hopefully being able to share shortly with committee. 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 am hearing workloads, ratios, and premiums matter to the nursing community specifically. But I am referring to the health section, so let's not just hammer it to -- or sorry, be too specific on one. That said, the Minister did allude to sharing it. I'd like to ask, can she share the last two years of data with Members so we can start talking about challenges and working on themes to be successful to keep them here in the Northwest Territories? Whether they're in a small community, a region, or in Yellowknife, it matters. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I will take that back to NTHSSA to see what we have available to be able to share that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1111-20(1):  
DATA COLLECTION IN NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES HEALTHCARE

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up with the Minister of health on the CIHI data gaps, specifically now around health information management workforce. How many certified HIM professionals does NTHSSA employ, and is that sufficient for meeting national reporting requirements? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Range Lake. Minister of Health and Social Services. Two questions there.

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

**MR. TESTART:** I think when the Minister finds out, she'll find that we are lacking, Mr. Speaker. The labour market supplement covers nurses, physiotherapists, social workers, many

professionals, Mr. Speaker, yet HIM professionals are excluded. Will the Minister commit to fixing this and provide labour market supplements for these important professionals so we can get our data to where it needs to go and use it properly? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I will have a conversation with my colleague, of Minister of health about that information -- or Finance. Sorry, I am Minister of health. Minister of Finance. It's been a long week.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of health. That would have been a really interesting conversation. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Look, if Cabinet has too many portfolios, there's Members who can come over and help them out.

Mr. Speaker, the NTHSSA is filling health information roles with uncertified staff who lack certification from the Canadian Health Information Management Association and have no recognized coding training. Will the Minister commit that coding positions will now require certification going forward for all these positions? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I am not sure how that is hired and how that is screened within our context, but I will take that back to NTHSSA. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1112-20(1):  
TRANSBOUNDARY WATER AGREEMENTS

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have another question for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Can he tell me if there is contemplation of new and emerging threats such as drought, data centres, water bankruptcy and their impacts, to water quality or quantity in future monitoring under the transboundary agreements or regulation amendments that we will see later this Assembly? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

**HON. JAY MACDONALD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think as we sit, you know, here in the fourth year of drought,

certainly, you know, the climate impacts are top of mind, and they'll certainly do reach out and impact the other discussion topics around development in the jurisdictions that are upstream of the Northwest Territories.

I will use the proposed Peace nuclear facility as an example here in that, you know, we are currently involved in the federal impact assessment, providing information. We are currently lobbying with Energy Alberta, the federal and provincial government on behalf of the Indigenous governments and organizations of the Northwest Territories to ensure we have meaningful input into those projects as they go forward. And there have been other projects as well in Alberta that have been identified, such as data centres, etcetera, which we are currently engaged in many of those conversations as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Oral questions. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

QUESTION 1113-20(1):  
RELATIONSHIP WITH NEW CHAIR OF THE  
UNUVIALUIT REGIONAL CORPORATION

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, now that there's new leadership at the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, my question is for our Premier. And has the Premier reached out and taken steps to renew that -- or his relationship and our relationship with Inuvialuit Regional Corporation? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I have. I am familiar -- I know Chair Elias from my previous role as education, culture and employment Minister when we were working on the school in his community, and so I made a number of trips up there and have had many conversations with him over the phone and in his house, so we're very familiar with each other. So when he was elected, I reached out to him that night, congratulated him, and I've been giving him a bit of space because I know how much information there is to absorb right at the beginning of that term. But we did reach out, requested a meeting and, yeah, so we've started that relationship. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to know. So when, then, Mr. Speaker, will the Premier be actually sitting down at a meeting with leadership from the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we actually had meetings scheduled yesterday but the chair was weathered in, so he could not make it down; however, we were able to meet with director Gillis as well as a senior advisor, and there was -- it was almost like speed dating, where I met with him first and then they met with every other Minister throughout the day. So it was -- they were great meetings. There was a lot of excitement generated, and I can tell that it's going to be a strong and productive relationship. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Final supplementary. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Yeah, that's great, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for that. So is the Premier able to maybe share some of that information he had and some of the topics that were discussed with director Gillis and Ms. Darling as well? I noticed that Ms. Darling was also in the building yesterday. Maybe there was something around LNG. But can he share that with us, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will start with the LNG piece. And I've been vocal about the moratorium in the Beaufort Delta and -- or in the Arctic Ocean as well as the potential for LNG in the Beaufort Delta, and so I wanted to make sure that the position I was taking wasn't at odds with the new leadership at IRC. And I won't speak for IRC on their position on that, but I wanted to make sure that that conversation was had right off the bat so going forward, I am not saying anything out of turn. We also spoke about the MOU between our two governments. So we have MOUs with a number of different Indigenous governments across the territory, and those guide when we meet, how we communicate, and they facilitate the annual or biannual meetings that we have with Indigenous governments. So we spoke about that and the desire on both our parts to renew that and add some unique elements in there that I think actually might make them very productive meetings, very business-oriented meetings. I can't speak for the rest of the Cabinet, but I am looking forward to getting a debrief on all of those conversations as well. But, you know, the meetings were about half an hour. We could have gone two, three hours each Minister, I think. They were very good meetings. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1114-20(1):  
PARAMEDICS

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I am following up with the Minister of Health and

Social Services on more questions about licensing and regulation of paramedics.

So some provinces have self-regulating paramedic professional bodies which require the paramedics to purchase their own professional liability insurance when they get their license, but in other jurisdictions, like BC, Ontario, and Quebec, the paramedics are insured through their government employer, not -- it's not attached to the license. So has the Minister or the health authority first received any assurance from any of these provincial regulatory bodies that license and regulate paramedics that those licenses or their insurance are portable, meaning that the regulatory body would still maintain responsibility for a paramedic no matter where they're working? 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, yes.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to perhaps more details in writing about that since there are many different regulatory bodies out there.

Has the Minister or the health authority assured that its private contractors for paramedic services carry full professional liability insurance that covers each of its paramedics? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, NTHSSA does not employ paramedics directly. They have contracts in place, and the contractors are responsible for ensuring that liability insurance is in place for their staff before they work. Thank you.

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

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I will take that to mean we're not sure whether or not those private contractors carry the full insurance, but.

Finally, the Minister has mentioned that complaints could be made to those regulatory bodies and provinces if something went wrong with the paramedic, but how would an NWT patient know where a paramedic is licensed to be able to file a complaint with some regulatory body somewhere else? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, individuals can make complaints to the Department of Health and Social Services and we would redirect the appropriate jurisdiction, or they can reach out directly to the jurisdiction where the individual is licensed. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1115-20(1):  
HOUSING IN THE DEHCHO REGION

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have some questions for the Minister of housing. Can the Minister of housing kind of give me an update of what is coming for the Dehcho riding in regards to housing or repairs or renovations? Thank you.

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

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't have that detail right at my hands, but I can provide that information to the MLA for the Dehcho region. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1116-20(1):  
APPRENTICESHIP POSITIONS IN  
INFRASTRUCTURE

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the old days, we used to call the Department of Infrastructure public works, including its transportation forerunner. In those days, they used to spend a lot of time to develop the trades industry through trades apprentices.

Mr. Speaker, my question is really about the framework of how we're working to support the lack of tradespeople on the ground and what role the GNWT plays. So I am going to start with asking the Minister is he aware of how many apprentices do we have within the GNWT system, specifically infrastructure? Thank you.

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

**HON. VINCE MCKAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have quite a few positions for apprenticeships. I don't know the current status of how many are filled. I can get that information. However, most recently, I have been working with the department on trying to find out exactly where the positions are, are

they filled, how many we could get out, posted out there, and if there's an ability that we can work with ECE to enable the SNAP program in those positions in order to get young people into those programs. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate the answer from the Minister. I will take that information if he can provide it. I believe the ratio is one tradesperson and two apprentices. Now, I am not saying we have to hire a thousand apprentices, but my next question is about how we maximize the opportunity about getting people trained and employed and becoming maybe independent contractors in their own right.

So, Mr. Speaker, can the Minister acknowledge and provide some information and enlightenment around that type of ratio. How are we meeting that challenge by hiring as many tradespeople to ensure that we have folks who can do this type of work? Thank you.

**HON. VINCE MCKAY:** Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah, ideally, we'd love to have that many apprenticeship people working, and, ideally, we'd love everybody who has a ticket to take on an apprenticeship. And that's ideally the goal. But at the end of the day, we just have to find the positions that are available, and if we can fill them, that'd be perfect. So, again, the goal is to find out how many we have open and available and continue to try to work to advocate to get these positions filled by hopefully, you know, young Northerners who decide to stay in the North and looking for work. So if we can catch them in high school and get them into the program, that would be perfect. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Catch them in high school, that's the only time I hear the positive phrase catch and release. We catch them, train them, and release them into the public.

Mr. Speaker, my experience around the broader portion of public works, and certainly as the MLA through understanding the system of infrastructure, etcetera, often we have a lot deferred maintenance and work outstanding, and we're not meeting that, SO how are we meeting these objectives to ensure that the GNWT assets are fully protected and maintained, knowing we're struggling to get tradespeople and potentially struggling even getting apprentices doing this work? Thank you.

**HON. VINCE McKAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have many tradespeople in the Department of Infrastructure that go around and, you know, do a lot of preventative maintenance on a lot of our assets in the GNWT. We have an asset management program that we utilize, and we have staff that -- you know, that are trained to take care of all our assets. So ideally, again, we'd like to have people training under them for many reasons, and hopefully we can get some good numbers back to the Member on positions open and where the staff are working. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 1117-20(1):  
HEALTHCARE INFORMATICS

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am sure you'll be surprised to know I have questions about health care informatics.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of health said in October that our health IT is, quote, outdated and can't do anything more. Is the vendor for that technology still providing security patches? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Her own letter states hospital charts are paper-based. The virtual care action plan calls for -- calls the systems independent islands of data. So how much of the \$700 million for the total budget of the authorities allocated to EMR replacements? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the EMR replacement hasn't come forward yet, so we're still in that process of developing the RFP. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the public administrator has been in place for 14 months with not much to show for it, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker. Has he been tasked with bringing the NWT into CIHI compliance? And if not, what is the \$700 million buying in system accountability? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have 33 communities. We have a state-of-the-art territorial hospital. It is very expensive to run. And we have -- I don't know how many staff that -- off the top of my fingers, but we have the greatest amount of frontline staff next to education, and that is what's cost -- the cost of the budget. The department, as well, holds a lot of the money. And so what the public administrator is not in charge of leading the EMR. The RFP is being between I think the office of the OCIO. And in the department, we have our own staff that are working towards getting that RFP out. When the NTHSSA becomes involved in that part is when we start to do the work of establishing -- what are they called -- the pathways within our system. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1118-20(1):  
MACKENZIE VALLEY FIBRE LINK

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions now are to the Minister of Finance.

I was listening to the Trailbreaker podcast the other day, and it got me to thinking about when the former finance Minister talked about the fibre link. My question really is about the fact that he'd spent a lot of time talking on that podcast about a missed opportunity and not generating money. So maybe we can set the record straight. Whether he's right or whatnot, we'll find out soon.

Can the Minister of Finance tell us why NorthwesTel is in full control of the fibre link and how much money the GNWT is getting out of this arrangement? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Mackenzie Valley Fibre Link is a project that is a P3 project. It's not fully operated -- it's actually operated by a consortium, so it's not fully operated by NorthwesTel. Thank you.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Mr. Speaker, with the diamond mines closing, no new mines opening, we need every revenue opportunity we can. Can the Minister enlighten this House as to how much revenue that particular initiative is making annually? Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's not -- this is not a revenue generator. The Mackenzie Valley

Fibre Link does provide a point of presence along the way, all the way up to Tuktoyaktuk now, so that certainly government services are available to link in, and then NorthwesTel, under CRTC's direction, was mandated to provide fibre to the home as a result of it. I can't say what the past Minister may or may not have made promises about. I can simply say that the Mackenzie Valley fibre line does provide that point of presence all along Mackenzie Valley to small communities. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Finance. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The P3 project, when I was here, talked about generating revenue for Northerners and access for Northerners. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister enlighten the House what happened, why it isn't making money through that P3 initiative as it was originally intended? Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the last Minister said. I can only say that in the last few years this is an area that doesn't generate money. It provides a point of presence, and we have continued to expand it all the way to Tuktoyaktuk, as I mentioned, which was a promise originally made back at the time that the project was being conceived, but it is not generating revenue to the GNWT right now. It is something that we provide in the absence of the market filling this void. So as are many things here in the Northwest Territories, when there's not a private market filling a gap, the GNWT does wind up stepping in. This is one of those occasions where we step in to ensure that there's a fibre available for residents and businesses along the Mackenzie Valley and all the way up to the coast. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1119-20(1):  
HEALTHCARE INFORMATICS

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to know from the Minister of Health and Social Services, as our EMR is near -- has -- I think it's nearing its end of life, if not ended its life and needs to be replaced, when does the vendor support for the current system currently end? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Can the Minister reassure the House that as the system is now -- not counting the RFP, because that's something that's yet to come -- that the medical information and information that the health system holds is safe from cyber security risk and the health information of Northerners is going to be protected until this replacement comes in? There are concerns, Mr. Speaker. People need to know their personal data is not going to be hijacked by some ransomware or shared willy-nilly with people out there in the world. Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the system is still supported and is safe. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, has -- to the reporting on health care data, has there ever been an implementation plan for NACRS data that would change our reporting relationship and ensure that we're getting things to national standards and bodies? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd have to get back to the Member on that question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Mr. Clerk.

### Follow-up to Oral Questions

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Rule 7.2(7)(2), I received follow-up information for the following oral questions from the first session of the 20th Legislative Assembly: 918, 1014, and 1017. These follow-ups will be printed in full in today's Hansard. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

FOLLOW-UP TO ORAL QUESTION 918-  
20(1):  
CHIPSEALING OF THE INUVIK BYPASS  
ROAD

Further to the response provided to the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake on October 31, 2025, the following additional information is provided:

I made a commitment to complete the chipsealing of the Marine Bypass Road in Inuvik within the life of the current Assembly.

To fulfill this commitment, the Department will complete gravel resurfacing, culvert repairs, and guardrail installation during the 2026 summer construction season. A chipseal

overlay will follow in summer 2026 if the construction window allows, with work continuing into the next season if required.

**FOLLOW-UP TO ORAL QUESTION 1014-20(1):  
MUNICIPAL LAND TRANSFERS**

Further to the response provided to the Member for Frame Lake on February 12, 2026, the following additional information is provided.

In June 2025, the Department of Environment and Climate Change signed a Memorandum of Collaboration with the City of Yellowknife which prioritizes the transfer of specific parcels through individual transactions rather than a bulk transfer.

This approach allows for more targeted bylaw development, budgeting, and surveying at scales that are practical and cost-effective for the City. The City currently holds responsibility for nearly all developable vacant land inside its boundaries, administering 2,471 hectares through fee simple or lease agreements, and seeking an additional 180 hectares through ongoing applications.

All steps in the transfer of land from the Government of the Northwest Territories require collaboration with multiple parties, including Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations, community governments, the Government of Canada, and other stakeholders. Given the complexity of land disposition and the many factors and partners involved, the GNWT cannot reasonably apply fixed timelines to all of the steps involved in the land transfer process, as many steps lie outside of the control of the Department. For example, the Community may need to establish a land acquisition bylaw if they don't already have one to retain the parcel. The Department is, however, committed to improving guidance and process clarity for applicants and partners to support more predictable and timely land transfers.

Work will focus on accelerating the steps within the GNWT's control, including internal review, coordination, approvals, and consultation processes, while continuing to work with partners to reduce overall timelines. Environment and Climate Change will continue to ensure that all applications are advanced in an expedited manner, with prioritization of housing applications. Bulk land transfers remain possible under existing legislation and policies, and the Department will continue to work with communities interested in larger parcels, including the City of Yellowknife as outlined in the June 2025 Memorandum of Collaboration.

**FOLLOW-UP TO ORAL QUESTION 1017-20(1):  
BIOMASS ENERGY AND FOREST  
MANAGEMENT**

Further to the response provided to the Member for Yellowknife North on February 12, 2026, the following additional information is provided:

The Government of the Northwest Territories Department of Environment and Climate Change collaborates with other GNWT departments, including Infrastructure, through shared climate change and energy working groups. ECC provides technical advice on how forest management practices, such as thinning and fuel reduction, can support biomass-energy initiatives.

The Department has also invested approximately \$110,000 in a Wekweeti pilot project that uses wood from FireSmart thinning to supply a community biomass heating system. The Tlicho government is also interested in possible expansion to additional communities.

The Department is supporting this work and will closely follow the results and lessons from the Wekweeti initiative. If the pilot proves successful, it could serve as a model for other small, remote, and forested communities with accessible biomass resources.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Colleagues, our time is up for oral questions. Oral questions. Written questions. Returns to Written Questions. Mr. Clerk.

**Returns to Written Questions**

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

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr Harjot Sidhu):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a Return to Written Question 27-20(1) asked by the Member for Yellowknife North on February 6th, 2026, regarding physician recruitment and retention.

The Member asked the Minister to provide the number of positions within the Department of Health and Social Services and the Health and Social Services Authorities that are dedicated specifically to the recruitment and orientation of new physicians, as well as the retention of existing physicians.

Within the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority, the Talent and Organizational Development Division and the

Office of Medical Affairs and Credentialling provide support for physician recruitment.

There are several positions within the Talent and Organizational Development Division that support physician recruitment; however, this is not their sole responsibility.

A Physician Program Specialist is responsible for planning, researching, designing, and implementing strategies and programs aimed at assisting the health system to attract qualified physicians.

A Program Specialist supports programs focused on attracting physicians, including the bursary program, the Clinical Observership and Job Shadowing Program, and the Family Medicine Residency Program.

Program Officers support an Inuvik specific recruitment initiative and support transition for new and relocating physicians within the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority and the Tlicho Community Services Agency.

Within the Office of Medical Affairs and Credentialling there are two Territorial Physician Recruiters. The focus of these positions is the recruitment of physicians, both locums and staff. They follow up on leads generated during recruitment fairs and conferences and are the initial point of physician contact regarding contracts. Territorial Physician Recruiters also secure dates and bookings for locums.

Additionally, there are Physician Administrative Coordinators in Hay River and Inuvik that provide administrative support for booking and scheduling recurring locums, arranging travel logistics as well as some orientation support.

The Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority does not have dedicated positions for physician orientation and retention. Orientation is variable, logistically challenging and is dependent on length of the work term and the date they arrive. For instance, a five-day locum arriving late Friday and starting work on Saturday will not have the same orientation as a new permanent hire.

The Member asked the Minister what lessons were learned from the temporary physician bidding initiative used to fill shifts at Stanton Territorial Hospital, that will be incorporated into future efforts at recruitment and retention of both locums and contract physicians.

A temporary shift bidding initiative was used in Summer 2025 at Stanton Territorial Hospital to stabilize Emergency Department physician

coverage during a period of acute vacancy. Lessons learned are listed below.

Bidding allowed for faster filling of urgent shifts by qualified locums, improving coverage responsiveness.

Northwest Territories rates for Emergency Department physicians at Stanton were not viewed as competitive, and that physicians were willing to adjust their schedule for the right price. The initiative worked in tandem with updated locum compensation rates implemented on June 1, 2025, and October 1, 2025, which enhanced the territory's competitiveness.

Timing for implementation was critical. Determining locum rates must be completed in a timely manner so early recruitment and planning can occur. Locums typically book work placements four to six months in advance.

The bidding process did create some administrative challenges. Higher locum turnover meant more time spent on onboarding and orientation, and managing multiple pay rates—along with tracking when each rate applied—added significant administrative burden.

While essential during shortages, reliance on shift bidding must not undermine recruitment into the Standard Physician Contract.

These considerations will inform future approaches to locum management and emergency staffing models across the territory.

The Member asked the Minister what recruitment and retention initiatives specifically target physicians, and what measurable impacts have been observed to date as a result of these initiatives.

The Authority has implemented the Revised Locum Physician Fee Schedule and Long-Term Locum Incentive Pilot. This increased the daily rates, standardized travel stipends, provided premium rates for high demand periods and incentives for locums providing care in territory over 75 days per year.

In addition, system level human resource strategies continue. These include the 2025-2028 People Strategy, leadership development programs, the Family Medicine Residency program, the Health and Social Services Bursary program and the Friends and Family Travel Program. The Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority will continue to participate in interest-based negotiation with the Northwest Territories Medical Association towards a new Standard Physician Contract.

Notable impacts of these initiatives are the ability to maintain essential services, despite approximately 65% of physician positions being vacant as of late 2025, improved specialist stability in areas such as General Surgery and Pediatrics, and increased locum participation when incentives are in place.

The Bursary program, since its inception three years ago, has awarded 16 bursaries to medical students or residents. The bursary program includes a return of service component, following graduation (completion of residency). One resident who is supported now works in Family Medicine and the ER at Stanton. Other bursary recipients are still in medical school or are in their residency.

The Family Medicine Residency program has resulted in permanent employment for two former-residents as Family Physicians while four others are recurrent locums.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

#### RETURN TO WRITTEN QUESTION 29-20(1): PARAMEDIC CONTRACTS

And, Mr. Speaker, I have a Return to Written Question 29-20(1) asked by the Member for Yellowknife North on February 6th, 2026, regarding paramedic contracts.

The Member asked about terms of the Government of the Northwest Territories retainer contracts for paramedic teams supporting wildfire suppression efforts. The Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority has a contract with Advanced Medical Solutions for the provision of 'as and when' paramedic services to support or supplement Community Health Centres and Emergency Room services during times of significant shortages in staffing that may result in a closure or reduction of a service. The Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority uses the same contract for paramedics to be designated as standby Wildfire Response Team medics. The Member asked how many paramedics were committed under those retainer contracts. Two Medic positions, one Advanced Care Paramedic and one Primary Care Paramedic, were secured for the wildfire response, from May 1 through September 31 in both 2024 and 2025. The contractor fills these two positions on a rotational basis, averaging two-to-three-week rotations for each above-mentioned position.

The Member asked if the retainer contracts for paramedic teams include provisions allowing assignment of paramedics to other health-system duties when they were not required for wildfire support.

Medics on standby for fire response are stationed in units or health centres where there is a projected decrease in staffing levels to supplement core staffing levels. The team can also be placed in a facility close to an active fire to allow ease of redeployment.

The Member asked if the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority tracked the proportion of retained paramedic resources that were used during wildfire seasons, including the percentage of total contracted personnel-hours that were used for active service versus those retained but not deployed. Deployments for each medic, including wildfire response, for example, community evacuation, are tracked. In 2025 the Wildfire Response Team medics were deployed to respond to Fort Providence between September 2 through to 28, resulting in an approximate 20% for the specific response, and 80% standby where they were used in either another Community Health Centre or Emergency Room location within the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority.

The Member asked if paramedic contracts for 2026 have been negotiated, and if so, are there any significant differences from previous years' contracts.

An extension of the current contract is in place and there are no significant differences. The contract will conclude on June 31, 2027, with the option for one additional year of extension.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Tabling of documents. Minister responsible for Housing NWT

#### Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 480-20(1):  
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES RESPONSE TO COMMITTEE  
REPORT 29-20(1): REPORT ON  
COMMITTEE PROJECT: HOUSING AS A  
HUMAN RIGHT

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 29-20(1), Report on Committee Project: Housing as a Human Right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Tabling of documents. Member from the Dehcho.

TABLED DOCUMENT 481-20(1):  
PHOTOS OF HOLDOVER FIRES ON  
HIGHWAY 3 APPROXIMATELY 15 KM FROM  
FORT PROVIDENCE, TAKEN DECEMBER  
11, 2025

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table Photographs of Holdover Fires on Highway No. 3, Approximately 15 kilometers Outside of Fort Providence, taken December 11th, 2025. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Dehcho. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Second reading of Bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, with the Member from the Dehcho in the Chair.

### Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** I now call the Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of committee?

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the committee wishes to consider Tabled Document 448-20(1), 2026-2027 Main Estimates, the departments of Executive and Indigenous Affairs and the Department of Housing Northwest Territories. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Does the committee agree? Thank you, committee. We will proceed. We will take a short recess and resume with the first item. Thank you, committee.

---SHORT RECESS

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Okay, committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 448-20(1), 2026-2027 Main Estimates. We will now consider the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

Does the Minister of Executive Indigenous Affairs wish to bring witnesses into the House?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Yes, I do, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses into the chamber.

Would the Minister please introduce the witnesses?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. To my right, I have Tram Do, director of shared corporate services. And on my left is deputy minister John MacDonald.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** The committee has agreed to forego general comments. Does the committee agree to proceed to the details contained in the tabled document?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Committee, we will defer the department summary and review the estimates by activity summary, beginning with Cabinet support, starting on page 122, with an information item on page 124. Are there any questions? Okay.

Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. If I call you Mr. Chair, I apologize; it's a habit. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I believe this may or may not be the right place to ask. It's a policy-based question. In the business plan, there is discussion around the NWT policy position on Arctic sovereignty and security. Can the committee please receive an update on the work being done on this policy? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Minister of EIA.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. That policy is something that I've spoken about in the House quite a few months ago actually, and events have been evolving so quickly that there's always something new to add to that policy and so we're just in the final stages of finalizing a draft, which we can then share with the committee. But it seems like every time we think we're close, there's an important event, there's something new that happens, there's -- DND announces something, and we want to make sure that we are not missing anything. So that's where things are at. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So in that explanation, I understand why it is taking some time. Does that explanation mean that there is quite a lot of granularity in this policy position?

I would assume that you would want to be as high level as possible in such a policy document so maybe the Minister can expand on his answer. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Minister of EIA.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I wouldn't say there's a lot of granularity. We don't want it to be too specific but we want it to be high level. But, you know, I mentioned that there's always something new and just recently we saw the defence industrial strategy, which is actually quite a significant component of the military investment in the coming years. And so even having that information, knowing what's in there, what the DND's plans are going forward has been helpful. And so it's incorporating things like that which aren't necessarily highly specific, but are still highly important. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will return to a Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So simply to put a fine pin in it, would it be an expectation for the committee to be able to see the policy before the end of the fiscal year? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you, Minister of Executive Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. March or April is what I am thinking.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** I think that's everything for me in this section.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Okay. Any other questions? No further questions, please turn to page 123.

Executive Indigenous Affairs Cabinet Support, \$2,443,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Moving on to corporate communications, beginning on page 125 with an information item on page 127. Are there any questions? I will turn to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I believe the Minister is smiling because he knows what's coming.

The functional support and improvement plan for GNWT communications. The last update we received from the Minister was that a project charter is on the way, and it's looking at

potential improvements to the function of communications across government. So as I understand it, this is an internal piece that looks for efficiencies. And when will the committee see further demonstration of the actions and outcomes of this project? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. To the Minister of Executive Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I'd like to hand that to the deputy minister.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Deputy minister MacDonald. Thank you.

**MR. JOHN MACDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So the functional review of the communications function is still underway. Just recently, the team has concluded interviews with the comms community so they're in the process of rolling up the feedback. So I would anticipate that we would be able to provide an update to committee in the coming weeks, which was something that was always intended as part of the project. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will now go back to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And so when that feedback and interviews are summarized, what are the next steps? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister or the deputy MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MACDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So once the feedback has been collated, the intention would be to circulate that back through deputy ministers, through Ministers, and to committee, seeking that political input and senior leadership input. And from that point forward, we'd be looking at how to action any concrete recommendations from the feedback from the comms community. So that would be how we would look to proceed. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So I guess what's contemplated is to provide recommendations and to act on them. That's great.

Will this be a sort of a continuous improvement project, or is this of boundaries and scope to like a closed timeline? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to deputy minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MACDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think this was always envisioned to be scoped as a closed timeline. But recognizing that some of the input that we may receive from communicators across government may lead us to conclude that we need to implement other measures that may allow us to innovate on an ongoing basis. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Continuous improvement is always great. So I will leave that one there for another time being.

The other piece I have under this activity is in the business plan. It mentions the OneGov project to develop, build, and launch a unified GNWT web platform that can consolidate ten core websites, the flagship site, I think it's just gov.nt.ca, and eight specialty marketing sites during the 20th Assembly. Could we get an update on that work, please, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Indigenous, Executive and Indigenous Affairs. Thank you.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. A significant amount of work has been done on this. And in fact, it has, there is really somewhat of a final product that has just been circulated amongst the deputies. And we'll be seeing that soon. The expectation is that the site will launch in spring of 2026. So just around the corner. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister -- Member for Great Slave. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I always like being promoted. It's pretty fun. That's all for me on this function.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. No further questions? Oh, Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So I know my colleague from Great Slave just asked some detailed questions about the communications functional review. And I am aware, I think that there was a previous communication, corporate communications evaluation framework completed several years ago.

As a non-communications specialist, what occurs to me is what is the point of any of these things? And hopefully, given that the topic is

communications, someone should be able to explain in plain language why any of this matters to the population of the NWT? What difference is supposed to make; What's the goal here? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So it's important to be able to communicate effectively and efficiently with the people of the Northwest Territories. And in my time as MLA, I've seen us actually come quite a long ways. I don't think we barely -- there was barely any social media use when I first started. We weren't live streaming things. But all of that has really changed over the past number of years. So it's important to always look at how we can advance and get better. There's a -- you know, government's been doing things a certain way for a while as well and so there's always the culture aspect of it. We want to ensure there's a culture of communication where people are considering communicating things right from the very beginning. It doesn't have to be an afterthought. And so while there's these reviews going on, there's also those efforts to immediately try and reinforce that way of doing business. And so there's a lot of work happening outside of the review as well. But for more information on the review, I will hand it over to the deputy minister. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you, deputy minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MACDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And while I am definitely not a communicator, I will try to be very brief. I think one thing would be to speed up communications. We want to make sure that Cabinet Ministers are able to receive the political communication support that they need, particularly in times where you, as the Premier mentioned, have social media and other areas where people can get information or disinformation rather quickly. So we need to speed up our response time. We need to improve the accessibility of our communications to residents. So our website, making sure that that's accessible from things like a readability to a visibility standpoint. And finally, I would say ensuring that our communicators' jobs are satisfying and that they feel like they're not buried within the bureaucracy, that they can be responsive in the way that they were trained. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. No further questions on this one.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Seeing no further questions, please turn to page 126, executive and Indigenous affairs, corporate communications, \$1,541,000. Does the committee agree.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Moving on to executive council offices, beginning on page 128 with an information item on page 130. Are there any questions?

Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, what I am interested in understanding here is what kind of ongoing leadership and professional development support we're providing to our Cabinet Ministers. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Minister for Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Whatever they need. We take the approach that we want to ensure that the Ministers are able to do their jobs, do it effectively. And so because of that, there is a budget that can be used to provide different types of training, whether it's media training, which is something, you know, quite basic, or whether it's training to deal with more complex issues. This is something we take very seriously in the office. And I know my chief of staff has conversations with the Ministers to ensure that they feel like they're getting what they need. And if they don't, we'll go out and we'll look for something that they could use and provide those opportunities to them. They can take it or leave it if they want but we recognize that their roles are quite intense and require a lot of skill, time management, all of these things. And we want to ensure that we're providing them with the tools they need to achieve that. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And yeah, really appreciate the Premier's answer to that question. I just want to be clear. What I am suggesting here is that, yeah, being a Cabinet Minister is a challenging role. And I think if there's one thing I learned, you know, I spent a bunch of years as a municipal councillor before I took formal leadership training. And following that leadership training, one of the biggest takeaways I had from that was that it's an ongoing process. The process of needing

coaching in difficult situations, in particular situations, and just constant development is a really important thing. So I want to make sure that we are providing that kind of support around our Cabinet Members. I am not just referring to this Cabinet, but I've kind of seen Cabinet Ministers get faced with, you know, really difficult situations over the years that I've watched the Legislative Assembly. And I just want to make sure that we are providing adequate levels of professional support to our Cabinet in the work that they're doing. And I advocate for the same thing for Regular Members as well. And I am constantly talking to the clerk's office about different supports that can be provided to Members because, yeah, leadership is an ongoing learning process. So just wanted to emphasize that and make sure that we are considering that and putting those supports in place for our leadership. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I didn't hear a question in there so just comment. Thank you. So I don't see any further questions. Any further questions?

Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So I just wanted to touch on one item in the business plan that I didn't see how it falls under any of the other categories of things in the budget. But one of the roles of EIA, according to the business plan on page 23, is to try to coordinate or work across GNWT departments around land availability. And this is a topic that comes up often in this House because it's so fundamental to economic opportunities, you know, a number of different kinds of community planning. So it says that -- I mean, the overall goal is to increase land availability within community boundaries. And the progress to date is that discussions are continuing. And my heart always sinks when I see that what we're reporting we've accomplished is that we're meeting and deciding to meet again.

But anyway, I wondered if the Premier or his staff could clarify, like what is the role of EIA in all this; what's the value added? And, you know, how they can measure their success in all of this beyond just discussions are continuing. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Minister of Executive Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, EIA's role when it comes to this really is the relationship with the Indigenous government and then the consultation aspect. There's also the role that I have as Premier in helping Ministers move files along. And so this has been one area that I've identified as an area

that I am supporting the Minister in, who has made this one of his priorities to enable more access to land in communities for building. And so this is one that I am committed to having real concrete results before the end of this government. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thanks to the Premier for that clarification. One more clarification.

So when he talks about the real concrete results that we're going to see before the end of this Assembly, is that written down somewhere? Where can we find what are those concrete results that we're shooting for before the end of this Assembly, like the details of what the goal is? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister for Executive Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I will have to go and confer with my colleague, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. But what we want to see is the concerns that we've heard over the years addressed. I want to see land become available. We want there to be a clear process with clear timelines, either a yes or a no. We want to ensure that there's opportunities for development. So what we're looking for in terms of results is land that can be developed. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So I will look forward to seeing some more tangibles in terms of goals if once the Premier confers with the Minister of ECC. But I think it's important we set clear targets for ourselves on this one. Thank you, Madam Chair. No further questions.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Next, I will go to the Member for the Sahtu.

**MR. McNEELY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think this is the relevant activity to ask this question on the executive office and the operational expenditure summary to support that office.

Is there anticipation for further increases in the budget to work with the Indigenous Government Council on upcoming new emerging concerns, if we can use that word. Like, for example, our economy is going down because of this and this and the oil field is

shutting down, the diamond mines are shutting down, so we really need to emphasize a united approach towards getting the voice out to Ottawa. And it's really complimentary to see this office and this Minister taking the IGs down to Ottawa like last October. So is there any additional monies to support those additional lobbying efforts between this government and the federal government? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And there is, it's in a future activity, the Indigenous and intergovernmental relations activity, which is about three or four in the future here. But yeah, I can assure the Member that there is. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. See no further questions, please turn to page 120 -- oh sorry, I have the Member for Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Yes, thank you. It says here, Premier's office provides Premier and the Ministers' office with political communication, strategic operation, advice and coordinations and, you know, and all related to political commitment. And in here in the business plan, it says, you know, part of the mandate is to encourage private -- or not encourage, not there, but where was it? Okay, no, that's okay, but still, okay. You know, encourage private investment in housing by reducing administrative and regulatory barriers. That's, you know, the mandate. The target, one of the targets is EIA, MACA and Housing NWT agree on the key issues affecting lands availability and jointly engage.

I think there is some overlapping of services provided. So, you know, first, the lands issues, I thought it was dealt by ECC. And here MACA is mentioned. I know, we all know, you know, there's a lot of duplication of programming services by MACA and ECC, Infrastructure. Had the Minister ever consider dissolving, dissolving MACA? Dissolving some of the Infrastructures department? Decentralizing jobs to save, you know, I mean, we're in debt and then, you know, municipal and communities affairs or community government operations, you know, O and M maintenance and operations. Some of that responsibility falls on the infrastructure as well.

You know, it could be identified as part of the infrastructure, even with the road maintenance. So, there's two. So, I just wanted to ask the Minister if have they ever considered, maybe not right now, you know, we can't leave our

colleague without a portfolio. So, but maybe for the 21st Legislative Assembly for the upcoming, consider dissolving some of these departments, amalgamating and decentralizing because I keep saying that, you know, and then you provide advice and everything. And it says here, you know, working with the Indigenous government and we've been asking for Tlicho administrative region too, so. Some of those can -- you know, once we're granted the administrative region, I am sure we can take on some of those. You know, it can go to our region.

Like even you said, you know, with the land claims, maybe 20 years from now we may not need GNWT. So I think now is the time to start amalgamating and dissolving some of these departments because people are kind of confused. They don't know who to go to, who to turn to because of land issues because there's some mentioned in the MACA and then some in the ECC and, you know, department of public works. We're all familiar with department of public works, not with the infrastructure. Transportations. So, you know, all those from the old days. So, now to the infrastructure, it just -- it created a lot of confusion and a lot of duplications. And I know that, you know, prior to 1999 or prior to Nunavut, we had 6,000 employees. Now even after Nunavut, we still have 6,000 GNWT employees. I don't know what happened there, who -- a lot of jobs were created.

So I am just asking, is there a planning place that the Minister -- we've done it in the 19th, where ECC and lands department, you know, we separate that. So, I am sure we can do it again, dissolve MACA, infrastructure, reorganize again, you know, to make program and services delivery, to operate more effectively and efficiently. Because right now, it's like we're all over the place and we don't even know who to contact. Here, it says, you know, like EIA, MACA, you know, and ECC deals with lands. And it's, you know, and engagement with the Indigenous government, service integrations, all that, you know, it's in there. So I just wanted to ask the Minister, is there a plan in place or all the Ministers are talking about it; are you guys -- in your meetings, have you ever talked about getting rid of some of those departments? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** I will go to the Minister of Executive Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So, first, I will say if Members are aware of any duplication where we have two government departments doing the same job, please let us know. Those are the kind of efficiencies I'd be happy to find and get rid of. If

there's a complete duplication, we don't need that.

In terms of the amalgamation, I am not looking at any amalgamations or dissolving any departments this term. That would have to be a decision for the next Assembly. As I've said before, I've seen that a couple of times now, and there is a lot going on, there's a lot to do, and that would take a lot of our energy away from the actual work that needs to happen on the ground for the benefit of the people of the territory. That being said, I do see areas of our government where I wonder why is that in that department. And there's been a few changes here and there with the service integration. We have taken on some files from other departments. And so in small ways, there are changes to what we're doing. But we're not looking at wholesale -- we're not looking at dissolving departments. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member from Monfwi. Okay, thank you. Well, that will be the next -- that will be the goal of the next government, hopefully.

Okay, because, you know, like -- don't worry, you're not going to be unemployed.

I feel for him. Premier, I do apologize. Because he's sitting right across from me and he's like red, you know. His face is just flushed, so. Premier, I am sorry, I do apologize about that.

But, you know, the reason why I bring it up is that duplication of positions or duplication of jobs, services provided, because, you know, like, in Behchoko alone, in Edzo too, we have infrastructures that are over 50 years old. You know, we have water pipes that we talked about, we mentioned it many times. And we asked MACA before and MACA said, well, that's up to the community government. And there's the infrastructure department. And that's their -- you know, their building. And they're responsible for many of these things. And they said it's not their responsibility. So whose responsibility is it? Like, MACA said it's community government. Well, we get the money from -- based on the funding formula, we get the money from MACA. And yet it's not enough. That's not going to fix up our aging infrastructure, the waterlines in Edzo which is going to cost over, I think it was estimated about over \$40 million, or somewhere in there. And then in Behchoko alone, now just recently we had issue with the water line. And since Monday, students were home until today. So today, students went back, elementary school students. We already have issues with attendance. Now that young people took an additional three days off. So who's, you know, like, I mean, we ask him he's going to say well,

it's up to the community government. It's not, you know. And/or the Ministers, they always say well, community does get money from the federal government. FYou know, that's an excuse that they always give us. So that's why I am asking. Because that's why I am saying, you know, like, there's so many duplications we don't even know who to ask, who to go to. Like, he's not going to -- he doesn't have the capacity, or he doesn't -- he doesn't have the authority to say yes to fix up our aging infrastructure. And over there, finance, you know, the infrastructure. So, and he does infrastructure too. But in the -- see, like, who do you go to? We know he's part of our department, he does transportation. And he doesn't have the authority to fix our aging infrastructure.

So now I know that in my region, because of the Indigenous government, I know one of their goal is to -- part of their cultural, their goal is to fix up those aging infrastructure. So which is good, they're going to do that. But at this time, we're still under the territorial authority. Nobody is willing to step in and help with the aging infrastructure in my community.

It's not just that, it's also the health centre, in Behchoko, in Whati, you know, and in Wekweeti as well. So that's why I am just saying that, you know, like, who do we go to? There's so many duplications that it's not fun anymore. Some people, they don't even know who to contact. Who do we contact? Even, you know, around here. That's what I hear from a lot of people, even my constituents, that's what they're saying. So yeah, so that's about it. I have no more questions on that but it's just that it's duplication. So maybe it can be one of the mandates for the next fiscal year is to amalgamate, you know, dissolve some departments. That would be, it would be nice to see that for the next government coming in, in 2027. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs, do you want to answer that?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Sure, I won't mention the departments and what they do, but I mean when it comes to municipal infrastructure, it's the municipality's responsibility. And, you know, in Hay River we were on boiled water advisory for quite a while because we needed a new water treatment centre. I know that Inuvik has -- their utilidor needs replacing. So every community is facing this, and the GNWT is also facing this. We talked about electronic health records today. A new system for that is, you know, north of a \$100 million. Like the replacement that we need to do of our infrastructure across the territory is

extraordinary. And so there is nowhere in the territory where you see all new infrastructure, all perfectly well working infrastructure. It's a constant battle to try and keep up with, you know, the maintenance and the replacements. And we're far behind. And I travel around Canada saying that we have an infrastructure deficit and that we need more support from the federal government. So the GNWT gets money, we take care of our infrastructure. The municipalities get money, they take care of their infrastructure. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Okay, thank you. No further questions, please turn to page 129.

Executive and Indigenous Affairs, executive council offices, \$4,312,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Members, we will have the Minister responsible for the Status of Women join the witness table for the next key activity, gender equity.

Does the Minister wish to change the witnesses at the table?

Thank you. Moving on to gender equity, beginning on page 131 with information items on page 133 and 134.

Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I understand that the NAP funding, and I am sorry, I just want to make sure I get the acronym right, the national action plan to end gender-based violence has been brought in from other departments into gender equity and EIA as a central location for that funding. And that NAP funding is 50 percent funded by Canada. And it's my understanding that the funding that we're currently receiving is time-bound and is going to expire at the end of 2026-2027 fiscal. And on top of that, you know, the historical funding to the NGOs that are subscribing to funding under this piece is not unsubstantial. It's not insignificant. So I am curious what planning is underway or starting to be looked at to fill this gap that we know is going to come in a year's time. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister responsible for the Status Women.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think that's a really important question and thank the Member for asking that question. The national action plan to end gender-based

violence, we signed an agreement in 2023 and it was a five-year agreement, but it was a 10-year funding plan. And at last July's FPT, federal-provincial-territorial table for -- status of women table, we had that conversation with our provinces and with Canada. How are we, how is the federal government going to extend this national action plan for additional five years, because it was a 10-year commitment. So it's really important that we continue these conversations at the FPT table, and all provinces and territories are advocating that we continue with this gender-based violence funds. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, so I am just going through some of the substantiation that the department has given us on some of the organizations that get this funding. It's not lost on me that the, like, amounts are not enormous when you look at them on a line item basis, but they are quite important to each of these organizations that receive them. So I am happy to hear that the Minister responsible is having these conversations with her colleagues from across Canada. But yeah, until there's a new agreement signed, I am going to keep pestering the Minister responsible on this one because it's very crucial to both NGOs, and now that I am looking back over our list, Indigenous governments. So that's more of a comment really, but I do have another question, Madam Chair.

The complement of staff has doubled from three staff members to six. Can the Minister responsible please give a substantiation for this? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister responsible for Status of Women.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The family information liaison unit through Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women is one full-time position, and there's an additional position that's a coordinator position, two full-time positions. And with this unit itself, it travels throughout the Northwest Territories and it talks to families, especially those affected by missing family members or those that have been murdered through gender-based violence or any other circumstances. So there's a lot of work that the family information liaison unit does and a lot of travel it conducts, and we commonly call it FILU, but family information liaison unit is the additional position. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Great Sleeves.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. That is possibly the cutest acronym I've ever heard come out of the GNWT. It sounds like a fuzzy little critter. But I think we're all a little bit tired and loopy at this point, Madam Chair. I apologize.

But I am curious if FILU has, in its travels then, sort of started to take some data or having some sense of the scale and scope of gender-based violence emergency in this territory. I know the Minister is well aware. I am wondering, are we starting to put together any kind of database picture on the need for supports throughout the territory and the gender-based violence sphere? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister responsible for the Status of Women.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Can I defer that question to the deputy minister, please?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Deputy minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MACDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think when it comes to the family information liaison unit -- I am trying to avoid that acronym now -- It's still fairly early days when it comes to data collection. A lot of the emphasis of the work to date has really been around traveling to communities, outreach, etc. I think there's a lot of work to do to understand trends and ongoing needs. So these positions are intended to help with just that understanding of scale and what the needs are, particularly among some of the most impacted people in the territory.

I think we're also in a period of staff renewal. So I think once we get these positions fully staffed, we'll be able to perhaps better answer some of those questions that the Member has asked. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for that context. It's very good to know. I mean, the good news story here is, Madam Chair, that gender equity sitting in EIA means that with the recent work of EIA to bring in more pieces around NGOs into the fold of things that they're trying to understand and get more of a viewpoint into boots on the ground, the NGOs in our territory, the Native Women's Association, YWCA, have been doing work on

this for, as the Premier noted yesterday, for decades. So I think there's some really good touch points that can exist once this unit is staffed up. And I would really encourage the Minister responsible, the department as a whole, to work carefully with NGOs in this space. More of a comment but would love the Minister's feedback as well. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister responsible for Status Women.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** I am not sure if this mic is working here, but I think the efforts to understand NGO needs -- and this is something that the Premier and EIA are working on. But as the Minister for Status of Women, having these conversations with the Native Women's Association, with the YWCA, with all our NGOs that work with gender-based violence or supportive living components, it's important to understand these needs and have these conversations and also have the face-to-face meetings and visiting their facilities. It's really important that we continue to do that. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Seeing no further questions, please turn to page 132, Executive and Indigenous Affairs, gender equity, \$4,938,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** We will now invite the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs to return to the witness table for the remaining key activities. Okay, thank you.

Moving on to governance and service integration on page 135, with information items on pages 137 and 138. Are there any questions.

Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The first question I wanted to ask is, given the role of governance and service integration, have there been any lessons learned on structural or governance changes needed in order to enhance the way that the GNWT operates across departments and agencies?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister for Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, lots. I will go to the deputy minister through you, Madam Chair, for some more detail on that. Thanks.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. We'll go to deputy minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MACDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I would have to echo the Premier. There have been lots of lessons learned, some of them hard won. Some of them we continue to learn, frankly, every day. One of the most challenging things that we are struggling against is siloing of our own structure. Another is the fact that every organization, it seems if you create an organization of three people, it comes up with its own culture and it's hard to break that down. So we've put in place mechanisms such as new assistant deputy minister committees and working groups that respond to that committee to help try to increase lateral communication across and among departments and agencies and, of course, build that information up towards deputies and ultimately to Ministers for greater accountability. That's just one example of how we've tried to counteract some of those challenges that we've observed. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I appreciate that. I appreciate, frankly, that there just is work going on to address that. I think it's something that government gets criticized a lot about. So I think it's good that we have people who are putting minds to how to address these issues of siloing.

Just on that note, I am curious if we've put a lot of thought into generally -- the deputy minister mentioned culture developing and how that can happen. I wonder if we put a lot of thought into the organizational culture of the GNWT and how we can shift that culture, where necessary, and as much as possible, towards service orientation.

So an example I am going to give is an issue that I was questioning the Premier on the floor about just the other day, about the various different departments that help people and their families with disabilities and how we've had a lot of success with EIA's introduction of the ISD unit and how that could be helpful for persons with disabilities. So the answer that I got back was the health department is working on this much wider effort but the situation we're dealing with is there was recommendations made in 2023 to change the way services were delivered. And so I would think if we have a service-oriented culture, we might be thinking of ways that we can solve some of these problems in the interim, knowing that we are working on something that's a wider effort that's going to take many years. What can we do now

to help people and help better integrate our services.

So the Minister doesn't have to answer specific to that issue, but I am just curious how we're trying to shift our culture towards helping people as much as possible and kind of shifting away from these what feel like bureaucratic answers when you ask, you know, well, what are you doing to help persons with disabilities? And the answer is, well, we've got this much bigger review going on so it's going to be several years of that. And what ends up happening is people sit without being able to access those services in an integrated way for many years, in this case six years. So it's clear to me that we need to be thinking about kind of solutions-oriented work. So a lot of words I just shared there, but I think that the deputy minister gets where I am going with this. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And I will start, then we can go to the deputy minister. But what the Member is talking about is what we're aiming for. In the past, there have been efforts to integrate services across government. They've all failed. And so the approach we're taking is to have focused efforts in one area, which was recommended by a third party. There was an extensive report, and the recommendation was to start on a defined area and learn lessons from there that then we could expand across government. And in the end, the ultimate place we land might be a Service NWT, a department that would be sort of the public facing government department where you would go for whatever you need from government. To try and do that all at once is not feasible. Things take a long time in government at the best of times, and when you are a small government and you're trying to do a bunch of different things, things can take much longer. But we want to do it right and we want to learn those lessons and then have -- I don't want to say a centre of excellence, but these units are like incubators where we look, what can we learn from this. And we have the five regional centres. There's ISDYK, which is the integrated service delivery in Yellowknife, formerly known as integrated case management, which is really more of a pathfinding unit. And then in four other communities, three right now, I believe the fourth will be set up soon, we have integrated service teams, which are actually officials from different departments and NGOs who get together and who really work together to try and support residents. But I can hand it over to the deputy minister for this. It's actually a very operational question. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to deputy minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MACDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And yeah, maybe just to build off of what the Premier mentioned, I think to try to tackle the Member's question directly around organizational culture, it is a difficult problem to solve. I think, you know, we look at it through a number of different lenses, getting information to employees, helping people understand sort of what the organizational mission is and where they fit into the bigger picture is very important. And I am not convinced that we've been doing the best job of that. And it's a conversation that we had recently at the deputy's table.

Training, of course, ongoing training, and thinking about service integration specifically. We've been working on training and outreach to staff to tell them what that looks like and where they fit into that picture going forward.

And the last piece that I think is important is leadership at all levels, whether it's at a deputy level or at a director or a manager or supervisor level, it's making sure you sit down with your staff, let them know what's going on, answer questions, and make sure that they're part of the bigger picture.

As the Premier mentioned, these service integration teams are important opportunities for us to learn. The main goal for these in the short-term is get staff working together, focused on homelessness, but identifying barriers that make it difficult for them to work together, and then provide those barriers to the organization so that we can remove them from frontline staff. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate those answers and do always appreciate chatting with the deputy minister about these kinds of things, because he gives very thoughtful answers to these kinds of questions. And I appreciate that we're thinking this kind of thing through. And I would just put a plug in there that, you know, when I raised this issue and identified this unit as a great example for the issue that I was identifying with persons with disabilities, I would like to put a plug in there that I think that that's an area that that could be looked at next.

And that was going to be one of my questions was, what programs is EIA looking to bring under a single window system through the ISD unit and how will that support some of the objectives of our mandate? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Maybe I will just go right to the deputy minister for this one. Thanks.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Deputy minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MACDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. That's a great question. And actually, under the government renewal initiative, the EIA's evaluation is intended to look at the data from the past years for the integrated case management, now ISD Yellowknife, to look at where those clients have been brushing up against other GNWT services, regardless of what department or agency they may be. And that will potentially give us a very strong clue as to what we should be expanding towards over and above homelessness. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to a Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, I am just noticing that I am running out of time here, and I did have some more questions. I will turn to a new subject.

Can the department provide an update as to whether dedicated staff to lead efforts to support NGOs have been hired and trained? Has the department seen any improvements related to the non-governmental organization stabilization fund? Do any challenges remain that they're still trying to address? Thank you. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** I will go to deputy minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MACDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. EIA has one position dedicated to the NGO sector support. I would stress, though, that that role is primarily focused on hearing from the sector at large and then coordinating across within departments and agencies to ensure that they're remaining cognizant of NGO issues.

So going back to the Member's previous line of questioning around how we get departments to work more closely together, a new interdepartmental table, where this position from EIA sits and chairs that table, looks at issues related to NGOs and looking at how we can better support NGOs as key partners and make sure that we're not losing track of them as a priority. So hopefully that answers the Member's question. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. No further questions, please turn to page 130 -- oh, Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So I first wanted to start with some of the targets in the business plan on page 27. And so I know a lot of work has been done in the area of integrated teams addressing homelessness, and we don't speak about it enough in the House. But the target was to create four integrated teams focusing on homelessness by March 2027. And it looks like the progress has been that there was supposed to be a launch of the teams by January 2026, which seems ahead of schedule. But I wonder if the Premier can explain, have we launched these teams, what has been accomplished, and what are these integrated teams focused on homelessness; what does that look like? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, there are interesting numbers in the business plan because we are, it is January -- or sorry, February 2026, and we're where we said we would be in March of 2027 almost. So three of the teams are established, the fourth in Behchoko we expect to be established by March. And the fifth one is the ISD Yellowknife site, which has been a longstanding site. Maybe I can go to the deputy minister for more detail, though. Thanks.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Go to deputy minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MACDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So in each of these service integration communities, we're establishing a service integration team. So EIA will have a coordinator who will not supervise other staff in other departments but really bring them together around joint case management. And like I said earlier, look for barriers that inhibit their ability to work on behalf of clients and to adopt a client-centered approach to providing services. And again, this is really focused only on homelessness at this stage. But to date, as the Premier mentioned, we've been in the process of staffing the coordinators and then bringing them for training and then launching them back into their communities to make sure that they're able to start the work. So we are progressing very nicely in this regard, and we're happy with how things are going so far. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Can the Premier or staff perhaps explain in more detail or more plain language what is the work that these teams are going to focus on, like where people will see them out there, what sort of concrete difference we'll see in our communities once these teams are out there working. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. So case management is what the teams are working on. So when in -- and this has been happening informally in some places around the territory. I know Hay River's on and off had integrated service delivery -- or sorry, integrated case management, unofficially. What we're doing now is making it official, and there's a structure around it. So when there's a client who is facing barriers, the team gets together, they can talk about that client, and they can then -- in the old days, they would work to address that client's needs. Now they can continue to address that client's needs, but we can also address the barriers at a different level. So if there are barriers identified by this team, instead of just saying well, it's too bad there's a barrier, it now gets escalated. And there's a way to escalate all the way up to the deputy minister and the Ministers to ensure that we're aware of that. And if it's a barrier that we can remove, if we're getting in our own way, then we can get out of our own way. So that's a bit of the difference. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, thank you, Madam Chair. That does sound like a step forward, and I know it continues to build on the work that's been happening for a number of years now.

I also wanted to look at the target on the bottom of that page. So the goal has been to develop functional zero -- I think functionally zero homelessness in a number of communities including Yellowknife, Inuvik, Hay River, Fort Simpson, Behchoko. And now in terms of progress to date, it talks about initial conversations that have been held last year. So what next? Like that's not a tangible sort of outcome yet. And again, we're just talking about discussions and meetings underway. So what's the next step and where is this all going to lead to? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to deputy minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MACDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And I think when it comes to functional zero, what we're really striving for with partners within communities is to make sure that if anybody is experiencing homelessness, that that experience is brief, it's temporary, and it's not sustained. And so what that looks like is making sure that within that community there is a sufficient capacity of housing alternatives to be able to absorb the population that needs housing.

And that could come across from shelters, transitional housing facilities, et cetera. In terms of concrete next steps, this one has been a bit of a slow moving one, largely because we cannot unilaterally impose a functional zero target on the community. It's really a conversation with community partners.

And that can include NGOs, it can include municipal governments, it can include Indigenous governments. So we're trying to facilitate those conversations. And I think initially one of our main focuses has been and will continue to be on data collection and making sure that we're all collecting data and sharing that -- able to share that data in a way so that we can understand the needs of the population in a given community.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So I know a barrier that's come up often in the past to data collection, as the deputy minister mentioned, was privacy concerns, and so there's been a lot of challenges around both different departments within the GNWT working together, working with RCMP, but also working with different NGOs, who are all trying to serve the same client, the same person who needs services.

But, you know, barriers to sharing this data, has that been overcome through this work, the privacy concerns or other barriers to sharing data? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister for Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So not all of those concerns have been overcome, but we are addressing them. So there is an interdepartmental working group that is getting together to ensure that, like I said, we're not getting in our own way and we're not negatively impacting our ability to deliver programs to clients. So one example is that

there's the development of joint intake forms. So instead of having a bunch of different forms for a bunch of different departments that one client needs to fill out and provide all the same information, there's a joint intake form.

But I know the deputy minister has more information, so I will pass it over. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Deputy Minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MACDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think one of the mechanisms that we've used to try to mitigate some of the effects of siloing and information sharing barriers is an interdepartmental MOU that includes a significant number of departments, particularly those on the social side of government and agencies as well. So that allows for appropriate information sharing under the right circumstances, and that's the tool that's allowed us to develop some of these frontline intake tools that the Premier mentioned.

Beyond that, I think a bigger issue is beyond government and data collection, we've been working with some of the NGOs for whom we provide funding to facilitate a free case management system that they can utilize which would allow us to access data and track and understand the needs of our shared clients much more effectively, which has been a very significant challenge for us to understand, for example, the number of individuals who are living in encampments and whether there's sufficient housing supports available to meet their needs. So that's an area that we're continuing to work on with our partners, but obviously it's not something that we're pressing on our partners. We're looking to make sure that we're supportive in that approach. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So just finally I wanted to express my support and gratitude for the new line item there around supportive housing. There's about \$2.29 million in a new line item to support permanent supportive housing for residents experiencing homelessness with particularly high acuity needs. And so just -- I know that it really helps to have stable funding you can count on for -- to operate something like that as opposed to cobbling together, you know, year-by-year funding, especially when we're talking about housing. Can the Minister just explain briefly, if he knows, how many people are being supported through that supportive housing, if

there is a certain target or if that is sort of to vary up and down? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Deputy Minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MACDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am not entirely sure which specific line item the Member referenced there, but I can say that we are investing in funding for the Spruce Bough program, and so I am sure the Member is aware of the number of residents in that program. And, of course, the temporary transitional housing facility by the Folk on the Rocks is another new area of investment.

And so we're looking at -- I think now we're somewhere in the neighbourhood of a dozen or so people in the facility, but we still have capacity in there, and I think looking to increase the number of occupants. So thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Now I will go to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. In the business plan, on page 33 under public safety, it speaks to the integrated team locations and identifying barriers to service that -- a service access that address the root causes of crime. So the measures being data collection related to the root causes of crime collected at those locations and services to support reintegration and crime prevention at integrated team locations and that they will work to identify barriers around integration and crime prevention efforts at integrated team locations.

Both of these pieces are in progress or under development. And I guess I am just curious what is the -- I guess the push to understand these barriers, not necessarily at the ISD level, but what, I guess, is the hoped-for outcome of these two projects? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So we received funding from public safety Canada, and I believe it was originally with Justice, and so part of that agreement was related to collecting this type of data. But the deputy minister has further detail. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. We'll go to deputy minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MacDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And yes, just to maybe echo the Premier's comments there, it was public safety Canada bilateral agreement which would show up in the mains under wraparound services. So

when that funding and responsibility for what was then integrated case management came over to EIA, those reporting requirements under that bilateral agreement were transferred to us. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Great. So this actually dovetails really nicely to my next question which is based on the main estimate, page 137. I am noticing that that line item for the wraparound services has dropped quite a lot on this particular key activity. Can the Minister please speak to the substantiation on that. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I will hand it over to our director of corporate affairs.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to director Do.

**MS. TRAM DO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Can you please restate the page that you're referencing? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Yeah, no problem at all. I am on page 137, grants, contributions and transfers of governance and service integration. The line item is wraparound services from 2025-2026 to 2026-2027. The number has decreased quite sharply. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to Director Do.

**MS. TRAM DO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. That is an estimate, and it's for potentially services, culturally appropriate services. It's not fixed. The overall funding for public safety is according to the work plan, and you see a little bit of a decrease of between the two years because of the change in the work plan; however, what we've been able to do is to secure carryover funding from year to year if it's been unused. So what you see in the mains is the original amount for 2025-2026 mains for overall for public safety was \$824,000, and then for 2026-2027 is \$681,000 overall, but we are anticipating that we'll be allowed to carry over any unused funds from current year to continue into next year to help with the work plan. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And yeah, I guess I am just -- I realize this is a nitpicky thing, and I realize that the wraparound services funding is greater than this particular line item. I guess I am just trying to understand why this particular part, I guess, as the director said, the work plan has reduced. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Member for -- Deputy Minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MACDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And thanks, Member, for that question. The work plan is -- it's a notional work plan that comes with the bilateral agreement. So for each year, there are a certain number of activities that are projected to occur, and over the first two to three years of the work plan, certain activities are intended to be more intensive. So once those periods have peaked, the budget drops, unless we have to ask for changes or carry forward or things of that nature. In this case, what you're looking at is an anticipated drop in travel activity associated with wraparound services or what we call service integration now. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am glad we could get there. That's what I was hoping to find out. Thank you. I don't think I have anything further on this key activity. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Member for Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. Okay. NWT wraparound services, my colleague just talked about that. Okay, it's 36 for the upcoming fiscal year, and it's funding provided. It's an agreement with the Government of Canada on crime prevention to support NWT wraparound services. You know, these are the forgotten people that we keep, you know -- it's regarding that, but, you know, the funding is coming from a specific -- for the specific cost. But the forgotten people that I mentioned is that I would like to mention here, people leaving the correctional centre, you know. This is -- I am sure a lot of them will benefit from this kind of program. We see a lot of our young people, especially young, you know, like young adults, that we know it's -- you know, it's overpopulated by the Indigenous, especially Indigenous young people, where a lot of them -- not just them, but there's older ones too, they keep going back to the correctional centre for -- especially with -- due to homelessness. Certain time of year, you know, you see there's an increase. And there's

nothing for them after they leave. You know, we've been saying that about people, young people who go for treatment, you know, when they come back, they go back to the same old environment, to the same environment, so they -- a lot of them, you know, they go back to the same pattern before leaving for treatment.

So same thing with these young people, you know. I am sure they don't want to be in there all the time. I am sure they don't like, you know, what's going on. But we're not focusing on them, you know. So I just wanted to ask the Minister, so -- because I think EIA is a department that we can ask of -- you know, of all the departments because you are -- it's the Premier's office, so Premier's office is in charge of everything. So that's why I am ask -- I just wanted to know, you know -- it's here, you said, you know, the program and services for children at risk, youth, and their families. What about, you know -- and those already in contact with the justice systems. But I feel like, you know, they're not getting the support that they need, a lot of them, because they're out on the street for a while, and they go back in, you know. They keep going back in. And I do feel for them, you know. Like, I mean, they don't deserve to be there, a lot of them. But I know the justice system failed them. We know the legal aid failed them as well. You know, they're getting poor legal advice, a lot of them. We know that.

So what are we doing? Are we doing -- what can we -- what -- I am not -- what can we do -- we know what to do, but it's just that the system. I think we need to do more so that our young people do not go back to jail. There's a lot of other options. And we know that because of the -- because of the nature of the crime, even a minor -- or what do you call it -- under 5,000, it could be for a chocolate bar, you know, like, things like that in a convenience store. I mean, they call the police, and they do get charged, and we see them at the courthouse, like, for a chocolate bar. My goodness. Even that -- that shows up on their criminal record. And that kind -- that really holds them back from succeeding in life. So I know that we need to do more. Because that was like -- I mean, about two months ago, I think there was one Yellowknife resident was in the courthouse for a theft under \$5,000 for a chocolate bar. I mean, that's absurd. You know, that's really -- I mean, that's wrong. So I just -- I don't feel it here because I don't hear the Minister talking about it too as well, Health and Social Services or other department. What can we do for these young people that are in the justice system? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And I won't speak too much about the justice department. I am not the justice minister. But I take the Member's point. We have a lot of people in the territory who are in and out of jail, who are on the street, who are in a cycle. And, you know, we do it -- you know, we have supports in the territory. You know, we have community counselling. We have SFA. We have these other things. But if people aren't in a place in their life to be housed and to stay out of jail, those types of things might be beyond their capacity at this moment. And so that's why -- that's one of the reasons we're focusing on homelessness like no government before us has ever focused. We are looking at -- not just looking at, we are implementing transitional housing. There's transitional housing here in Yellowknife. There's plans going forward for many more transitional housing units. Because we recognize that the way we've been doing things is not working. People need stability, and they need support. You can give somebody a house -- as MLAs, I am sure we've all helped people get housed, and then they're unhoused in the, you know, not too distant future. We've all seen it happen.

And so it's clear that people need something more to get that stability in their life. And so what we're doing with transitional housing really is that work. Because a lot of folks, it's going to take intensive, you know, support day after day, someone always there who they can count on, they can rely on, who can support them, until they get to the point that they need. So the investments in transitional housing, investments in wraparound supports, I think will help get at what the Member is talking about. Because it's -- we have to deal with people at the individual level.

This is a person-by-person issue, and people need personal support, and that's what we're doing through our initiatives here and our efforts. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. You mentioned the transitional housing. You know, I have a lot of constituents due to no housing, due to lack of housing and homelessness. They're in Yellowknife. And a lot of them are waiting to get into that program over there by the airport. When is the opening date for that place? Because often, you know -- like, I talked to about five people from Tlicho region, and they're saying they're waiting. In the

meantime, I see some of my homeless because it's cold. I went to visit -- I visited some of my constituents today at the hospital, and I saw some of them. They said this is the warmest place that we can be. So, you know, I had lunch with some of them.

So, it's just that that's -- it's -- if that transitional unit was open, they're saying that, you know, they would be there right now. But they don't know when it's going to be -- when -- we don't know the official date for opening of that unit. So if the Minister have an idea or when is that unit going to be open so that, you know, our people can start going there and maybe get -- I know there's one that I am -- I was talking to. He's been sober for almost a year. He just needs a place right now, so -- and then he's -- I am -- I am proud of him because he's going -- he's seeking help, you know, but -- and he's trying to stay in a warm place during -- during this season, the cold month.

So -- so do we have a date, opening date for that unit by -- by the airport? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Indigenous and -- Executive and Indigenous Affairs. Thank you.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So it is open. The -- I believe it opened just before Christmas. There were some issues that resulted in people not getting in there as quickly as we would have liked, but those issues have been resolved, and I think it's around half full right now. I did a tour there a couple weeks ago maybe, and they said they have a list of about 140 people, I think, is what was on that list, and not everyone on the list is a good fit for the transitional housing. They have different criteria that they use to, you know, screen people in and screen people out, and this is being done by the Yellowknife Women's -- or the -- yeah, Yellowknife Women's Society. So this is -- these are the folks who they deal with on a regular basis, and so I -- I've got a good sense that they know what they're doing and they have a good handle on the population, and they don't want to put people in there who are going to fail or who are going to cause other people to fail. And I don't have a list of all of their criteria and how they make these decisions, but they're -- they're being careful. But they -- they want to get people in there as quickly as possible as well. There's maybe not as many people ready for -- for that type of unit as we would have hoped because we have such great needs in the territory and so many people still are struggling with addictions, but I am hopeful that we're going to get that full to its 24-bed capacity in the near future. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Okay. Thank you. At this time, I am going to call a recess, and we'll continue. We'll resume once we come back.

---SHORT RECESS

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Okay. We have no further questions.

Please turn to page 136, Executive and Indigenous Affairs, governance and service integration, \$12,894,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Moving on to health care systems sustainability on pages 139, with an information item on page 141. Minister, would you like to change your witnesses.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Yes, I would, Madam Chair. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, would you please escort the witnesses from the chamber and escort the ones that need to come in.

Okay, would the Minister please introduce his witnesses.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To my right is Terence Courtoreille, associate deputy minister, healthcare system sustainability.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Healthcare system sustainability on page 139, with an information item on page 141. Are there any questions?

Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Just one sort of overarching question for the unit. Is it anticipated if the health sustainability unit will be making an evaluation plan or plans to -- as part of the work that they are doing in this space? And if that is the case, could those plans be shared with the committee? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, there's a lot of planning, and there's a lot of analysis, so maybe I will go to the associate deputy minister for some detail on the specifics. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Associate deputy minister Courtoreille.

**MR. TERENCE COURTOREILLE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. There is a monitoring evaluation plan that we have which guides our work and that -- the details of that plan are posted online, and we'd be happy to share that again through my Minister if that's the desire.

We also have -- and Members might recall this phase of our work is being prioritized into seven areas, and as we go through each of those areas, we're conducting assessments, all of which are targeted towards the 2027-2028 business planning cycle later this summer or early fall. So we're currently in the middle of completing those assessments. Between now and July, we anticipate to have five of those seven priority areas completed. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Great. Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for that. I guess just diving slightly below the surface, then, is there an anticipation that the monitoring and evaluation plans for those seven areas that Mr. Courtoreille spoke about, would those then transfer into HSS and NTHSSA as this unit reaches the end goal of its purpose to find the sustainability features? Like, will the work that's done to monitor and evaluate these functions then carry over into the health system, I guess is the best way to put it. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to associate deputy minister Courtoreille.

**MR. TERENCE COURTOREILLE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, certainly we're not doing this work in isolation. We do work with the department of health on these initiatives, and as we progress through each of those seven priority areas. We also work with the authorities and the program areas as we complete those assessments. We actually have a project team that is being comprised of those agencies, and we meet on a monthly basis to review our work and to review progress. But the end goal again, again, Madam Chair, is to have those recommendations compiled and considered as part of the next budget cycle. Thank you, ma'am.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am absolutely convinced that my colleagues have

better questions than I do, so I will cede my time. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Any further questions? Yellowknife North, Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So with this unit, there's only a few parts of the business plan that speak to what the targets or goals are on this unit, and they -- that's on page 11 to 12 of the business plan, or page 95 to 96 in our full binders here. And they all have to do with the activity or the goal of defining what are the core programs and services to be delivered. And, in fact, when you look at the public fact sheets that the unit has put out in terms of what do we do, what do we want to achieve, again it says what do we want to achieve. We're going to take a system-wide approach and determine how to sort of answer the question. The fundamental question is what programs and services should be offered. And yet the steps that have been taken so far -- you know, we also have a vague sense that this has to do with saving money, being more efficient. So the unit looked at what are the top things costing money and, you know, a list of top seven things that are taking 70 percent of the system's cost growth, and they're all things that we have to do. Addictions recovery, foster care, long-term care, medical travel. Medical travel is the biggest one, unsurprisingly. Physician services, paying for doctors, out of territory physicians and hospital services, and supported living.

Okay, Identifying that those things cost the most money doesn't answer the question what are the core things that we should offer or not offer.

So this unit sort of continually has perplexed me in the sense of all of the official targets say that the whole point of this exercise is to figure out what's core and not core and then I guess to save money by not doing the things we decide are not core, but then when you zero in on how to save money, it brings us back to things that I think are unarguably core. We got to do those things, but we somehow have to do them more efficiently. And there's mention here and there sprinkled into the HSSU of -- that the unit is going to recommend ways to make some of these existing programs more efficient. But I am not clear how the unit's going to go about that or with the -- you know, the staffing complement, the -- like, do they have experts in, you know, for example, how we can use virtual care to save money on medical travel -- you know, like, how we're actually going to save money on these things requires, you know, expertise of practitioners, people -- people in the system. And so I guess I am not sure how to reconcile the official

overarching goal with how we're actually going to save money. So maybe in essence that's a whole speech. I have my little soapbox to start. But maybe my first question will be if it seems that much of the work of this unit is looking at the big ticket items that we're offering that seem kind of non-negotiable to me and how to make them more efficient, why is none of that mentioned in the business plan, and we only see in the business plan the goal of identifying core versus non-core health services? Thank you, Madam Chair. I will start there.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister for Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. So the business plan, it's light on the healthcare system sustainability unit because the unit is to look at the services and provide an analysis to Cabinet. There's not much beyond that. I mean, that's a lot of work, but it's a very narrow and targeted focus. And so the goal of the unit is to do that work and provide advice to Cabinet. So, I mean, if you look at bed-based addictions treatment, if the argument is that we are delivering that as perfectly and efficiently as possible, then there would be no purpose for us to go and look at that. I am not of the opinion that we're doing everything perfectly and as efficiently as possible, and that's why we are digging into this because, as I've said before, during my time in Cabinet, I could not get an answer on where the money's going. I couldn't get a handle on why the costs keep rising, how many new positions we had, or anything like that. And so this unit is able to look at what we're doing, look at alternatives that perhaps haven't been looked at because that's not the way things have always been done, and provide that type of advice. So an issue we often run into -- I often run into anyways at Cabinet -- is that the issues are in the weeds, and we're not in the weeds. I am not out there, you know, embedded in a health care centre. And so we need to be able to get into the weeds a bit and have it presented to us in a digestible way to understand what's going on and what changes that we can make. So to say, you know, bed-based addictions treatment, yes, that's essential. Every jurisdiction in Canada provides this service, we're going to continue to provide the service, and we want to do it better and at less of a cost to the taxpayer so we have more money to put into other services. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Is it fair to say at this point that most of the money

that we can save here is not going to come from finding non-core services and eliminating them? Is that fair after this -- where we've got to so far with the analysis of what is costing the most money, what is growing the most in money in cost, is that a fair conclusion? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Sorry, Madam Chair. If I can get some clarification, there was some double negatives. I lost the thread on that one. Sorry, thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, I will try to -- I will try to be more clear. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Is it fair to say that the cost savings are going to be found in making existing programs and services more efficient rather than in looking for programs and services that we can label as non-core and then eliminating them? Is that clear? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think that my hope -- and, again, there's a lot of work to be done here. I've seen the very first analysis so far. We're part of it. And just from what I've seen, there is money to be saved while still continuing to deliver the service. And so I don't think that we have a plethora of different programs that we can just cut and get rid of. In the North, we have to over-capitalise. We have to provide services even when there's a small number of people who need those services because that's what governments do. And so we're going to continue to do those. But within those services, I believe we're going to find the savings. There might be some services that we determine that we're not going to continue. But from what I've seen so far -- and of course this can change because, as I've said I've seen one of these, there is savings within the programs. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So one of the observations that is printed in the unit's preliminary analysis fact sheet last year -- well, there's two main observations, that there could be better financial tracking but, secondly, that there is overlap within corporate

service functions across the system. And this is something that we hear anecdotally from lots of people within the healthcare system who work within it. And it was supposed to be one of the core sort of parts of the work plan of the public administrator. You know, there's this sense amongst lots of people that there seems to be overlap and too much concentration of people working in the sort of administrative level versus frontline level in the healthcare system and, you know, we have health authorities, we have the department, there's lots of different offices. So if this is one of the early insights, how is this unit going to get at how we can streamline that sort of administrative or corporate level within the healthcare system and eliminate some of that duplication? Is it a matter of getting into the weeds, or at what level is this unit going to do that analysis? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. So right now the analysis is being -- is focused on the programs that have been prioritized and the areas that have been prioritized, as the Member mentioned those seven areas earlier. But that said, through the work it's evident that there are areas of duplication. There's NTHSSA, there's the Department of Health and Social Services, there's the Department of Infrastructure and finance, and among all of those, there's overlap for capital, for privacy, for IT, and there's areas that we know that we can look at to address some of that overlap. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Next, I will go to Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Okay, thank you, Madam Chair. So, yeah, I am going to continue on a very similar thread to what my colleague was just asking. And I guess a few questions I've had about the unit.

One is that, you know, the unit has been established now for a while, and they've staffed up and it sounds like gotten well into their work with some results coming to us in the near future. I am just wondering, you know, was there ever -- and I do apologize if I've missed a report or an update somewhere. That is easy to do in this job. But were there any short-term changes that have been identified? I mean, the previous Member was just starting to speak to things like administration. And, yeah, I am wondering if the unit has been able to identify any kind of short-term wins that have come out and, like -- or light bulb moments where it's like, wow, we really weren't tracking this thing and by doing so we figured out that money was

getting spent that didn't need to be. Have there been any insights like that?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So the idea is really for a comprehensive look at some of these areas that will then be presented to Cabinet to make decisions. So it's not so much an iterative, here's some information, you should go and fix this. It's going to be a -- I would say a bigger initiative than that. There's a lot going on in the healthcare system and, you know, which is why we have the unit, because the healthcare system is too busy to do these -- to look into these kinds of things, essentially, and so I don't want to pepper them with, you know, try and make this change, make this change, make this change. They're doing their own review, they're doing their own program enhancements, all of those things. And so the system was continuing to be the system and do what they do. We are working sort of behind the scenes, gathering information so that we can make better decisions. And from the information that is gathered, there are short-term wins in there that the health system could adopt. We do make that known to them when we come across something, that we do point it out. But I'd have to defer to the Minister of health in terms of how they are adopting those. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Okay, thank you. Certainly, I think we may have identified an area where the department could maybe follow up with us in writing afterwards. Just knowing that there have been things identified and that follow-up is happening in a different department, I would be curious to hear that progress. I think it would be helpful for us to know and understand. But we have limited time here, so I am going to move on.

I know that there was a report that was released early in our term. I am deeming it the MMP report. I can't remember what its official name was. But it had a number of recommendations for efficiencies that could be found. And I am just wondering if that report and the recommendations in it have been considered by the unit. I am sure that there's probably a number of those, not necessarily MMP-derived reports but reports about how we can achieve better system sustainability of this or that unit. Like, for example, you know, we were asking the health Minister just the other day about the supported living review. Well, there was a bunch of recommendations in that review for

supported living, and now the unit is reviewing supported living. And the Minister has been telling us that we can't make the changes that the review recommended because the unit's not working. So the difficulty I get into as kind of a Member of the public and a layperson looking out into the system is that we have a lot of these reports, and it seems to me like in some ways if we just went ahead and implemented some of the things in the reports, we'd be ten steps ahead as opposed to reviewing and reviewing and reviewing. So I am wondering if the Minister can comment on whether the unit's been able to use recommendations from some of the many existing reviews that we've already done, that we've paid a lot of good money for and spent a good amount of time on. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, the unit did review that. I would say the unit is probably now the foremost expert on reviews of the healthcare system. They've read every -- everything that's ever been written in terms of any sort of analysis or reviews they could get their hands on. And so that is all being considered. Everything out there is being considered in these reports. And so I can assure the Member that, yes, if something was written about the healthcare system, the team has looked at it, and they are considering how it fits into these priority areas and what efficiencies they can find based on the facts and the data that they have and then the recommendations in those reports too. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So please forgive me here but, I mean, it sounds like what we're doing is there's a huge amount of analysis and there's a large number of decisions that are going to come out of this, and the way it's being framed to me in this conversation is that this is all going to kind of hit Cabinet in one big meeting. I am sure it's not going to be exactly like that. But I am just wondering, you know, with the MMP report -- I mean, that one's now several years old -- what's stopping us from just going ahead with some of the recommendations in there? I mean, I would imagine that with the sweeping changes that are potentially going to come out of this, if we try to bring them all about at once, it is going to shock the system in a big way. So is there something to be said for rolling this out piece by piece? Maybe there's something to be said for doing it all at once because it makes the

most sense. I am curious to understand how the unit is thinking that through. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And so this will come to Cabinet and, you know, the way the Member described everything coming onto Cabinet like a tsunami, that's just Cabinet. That's how every meeting is essentially. We get a thousand pages in front of us with major decisions that we need to deal with. So this will come to Cabinet but the implementation of it is not going to be, you know, March 1st of -- or sorry, April 1st of, you know, 2028. There is going to have to be a phased approach. The healthcare system needs to continue to function as a healthcare system, so we want to make sure that it functions, and to try and -- to have a wholesale change, it would be too disruptive. I assume -- again, I am not in the system, but that is what I understand the plan is, is to make these changes and then implement them in a fashion that is not too disruptive and that can be absorbed by the system. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And not to belabour the point, but I guess what I am just wondering here is -- you know, I will focus on the MMP report because it's probably the one I am most familiar with at this point. But, you know, there was some key recommendations in there that it's just really are we going to do this, or are we not, and if we're going to do this, this is how we're going to do it. It was pretty clear. The report is publicly available. Anyone can have a look at it. So I guess what I wonder is how much analysis do we really need to do? Is the analysis not already done? And why wait, is really the question for me. Like, you know, the Assembly has four years to get stuff done. I don't want us to be in a position where we're taking all the significant actions all in the last six months of the Assembly or the last year of the Assembly. I know that the way our election cycles and the government cycle all works, that tends to be the case. But I would hope that we could make decisions as we go and that we'd build a system that can do that, make decisions when we get the recommendations as opposed to waiting and waiting, and -- I think I've made my point. I will wait for the Premier to respond. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And when I say it's all going to hit Cabinet at once, you know, it will be all decided, I believe, in a relatively short period. But as these analyses are done, we -- can be distributed to Cabinet, we're going to -- there's going to be something to be shared with MLAs as well, and so there will be time to absorb these things. And in terms of the why wait, I mean, that's -- again, that's a question for the healthcare system. The healthcare system has gotten to its current state because of how it's been operating, and so what we're trying to do is figure out how it's operating and how it can operate better. And that's the goal of this unit. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And the reason I am sticking so hard to these points is this, and that is that we have no shortage of reports that have recommendations that have failed to be implemented over the years. And I am not just talking about health. I am just talking about government in general. Implementation seems to be a much bigger and more difficult problem than getting recommendations for what can be done to improve things, and so I think it's something that we should be considering.

With the very little amount of time I have left, the last point I wanted to make is knowing that the unit is focusing so much on programs -- I've made this point a number of times -- many of these programs are beloved to people and are not things that people are going to be letting go of. So how is the unit balancing the need for sustainability with the fact that the programs that we're reviewing are essential to many people in the Northwest Territories, and we're not going to want to get rid of the program itself. How are they balancing the need for program versus the need for sustainability and the need for maintaining the programs that we have? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs. Thank you.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And, you know, as was mentioned earlier, there's programs that we're always going to have that every jurisdiction in Canada delivers and, you know, on the list of programs that are being reviewed, that's primarily what we have. And so we know that, you know, medical travel is going to, you know, be core in the territory. We're going to need medical travel. We have a big territory. We have a lack of infrastructure. We're going to need medical travel. Are we doing it as efficiently as possible?

I would say we're not. I mean -- and there are anecdotal -- you know, the Minister of health is making changes now, so there are changes happening where things have -- where the pressure really has built up. And it's clear that small changes can make big differences. So there are things happening there now. But, yeah, maybe I will leave it there and the Member can have time for something else. Thanks.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. No further questions. Please turn to page 140.

Executive and Indigenous Affairs, healthcare system sustainability, \$2,185,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Moving on to Indigenous and intergovernmental relations on page 142, with information items on page 144 and 145. Are there any questions?

Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I'd like to change witnesses.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Right, okay. Sergeant-at-Arms, would you please escort the members out and escort the other witnesses into the chamber.

Thank you. We're moving on to Indigenous and intergovernmental relations. Any questions? Are there any questions?

Member for -- I have Yellowknife North on first.

**MS. MORGAN:** Look at me. Thank you, Madam Chair. Okay, so the agreement many years ago -- well, at least some years ago -- that established the Intergovernmental Council on land and resources management, the IGC, states that it's supposed to be reviewed every seven years, you know, how well the agreement is working, how well the Intergovernmental Council is doing, whether processes can be improved. And so what is the status of the seven-year review? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So the last Intergovernmental Council meeting was held in November, and it was -- there was direction received from the council to begin the review. Maybe for the details of the review, I can hand it to the deputy minister. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to deputy minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MacDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. As the Premier mentioned, at the last Intergovernmental Council meeting, direction was provided to officials to proceed with undertaking the review. There is a transitional review working group that's been established with participating governmental officials. That group met on July 18th. The work will have to continue. At this point there's still quite a bit of work to do to make sure that all parties are fully aligned on the scope and nature of the review. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So just to make sure that I am clear, so has the scope of the review been determined in terms of what are the main issues or areas for improvement people want to look at? And then, will that scope be made public, or is this all to be done internally? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And so I will start, and then we can go to the deputy minister. But, again, this is one of those councils where the GNWT is one of the parties at the table and so the pace is often dictated by the party with maybe the least capacity or the least availability. And so it doesn't always move as quickly as everyone would like and, you know, I think those of us around the table as well. But I can hand it to the deputy minister for some more detail on that. Thanks.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Deputy minister MacDonald.

**MR. JOHN MacDONALD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The working group is scheduled to meet again in the earlier part of this year. So their next major step is to develop the terms of reference for the review, and that terms of reference would then be advanced to leaders at the Intergovernmental Council itself for approval. And at that point, we'd have clear parameters in terms of scope. And maybe just building off of what the Premier mentioned, any sharing of -- public sharing of information of the terms of reference or the review would have to be something that the parties would agree to collectively, not just one party such as the GNWT. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I mean, more generally, in terms of the public being able to see what work is ongoing of this group, my understanding is that Intergovernmental Council meetings are not ever public. Has there ever been discussion within the group as to whether the public could have sort of more idea of what's going on there, what's being discussed there, even just a better appreciation of what gets accomplished by the group? And does it require, like, unanimous -- does every single party around the table need to agree on everything, you know, including this? I think a lot of people are just confused about what's even happening there or how it works. And if nobody's comfortable making anything public, it doesn't, you know, help clarify for anyone out there what's actually going on there. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. So there's the Intergovernmental Council which is made up of the elected leaders, and we meet only once a year. There's a secretariat that meets much more often. And then it's the Intergovernmental Council that really guides our work when it comes to the legislation and how we work together. And so it's always been the goal to have unanimous consent on things moving forward, but I think that the review will help inform how that -- you know, how that history continues forward and whether or not we want to do something different. There is the opportunity to move ahead without the full consent of the group, and perhaps there's times when that's -- is what needs to be done. But this is an area where, you know, if there was more hours in the day, more days in the week, I would like to spend more time actually on this Intergovernmental Council and, you know, convene another two meetings a year, perhaps, so that we can actually get together and have some substantive conversations because I think it's an important area that is much in need of a review and some more focus. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Another question I had, on page 144 of the budget, there is essentially a doubling of the funding for Indigenous intergovernmental meetings fund from \$300,000 to \$616,000. And so what's the reason for doubling that and what

is meant to be accomplished or changed with the doubling of that funding? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So it's because we are working more closely with Indigenous governments. When the Council of Leaders was created, I believe there was one year of funding to support that group, which is a very large group. I think last time we went to Ottawa there was 26 Indigenous leaders that came with us. And that was -- so that was one year of funding. And so we have not had that funding since then. And, you know, we're demanding -- as an Assembly, we want to work more closely with Indigenous governments. I want to work more closely with Indigenous governments. And so it takes more resources, especially when we want to move things more quickly. And so this funding will allow us to continue that work. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay, I will leave it there. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Next, I have the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. In the business plan on page 6, there is an action that discusses reviewing the GNWT principles and interests for negotiations to explore possible updates. And it's my understanding that there will be an internal review on those principles and interests by the end of this fiscal. Let's just start there and see if that's on time. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. No, that's not on time. That said, I am digging into those types of materials myself, and so once the department catches up I will have plenty of input for them. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you to the Premier for that. I also am curious, then, what is driving -- beyond perhaps requests from Indigenous governments, what is internally driving this review? Is there anything that the Premier is aware of that isn't working that he is specifically keen on seeing being updated? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of the EIA.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So, of course, these business plans and these targets were all created in our first year, and as we go, we learn. And so what I am finding has been more useful is to meet personally with the Indigenous governments, with the negotiators, hear directly from them, and see why it's taken us, you know, decades to make progress on things or not make progress on things. There have been instances where there has been some back-and-forth between basically ourselves and the Indigenous governments on some of the finer details of potential future agreements, and so we've dealt with those at the Cabinet table. And so the idea was to look at everything that we're doing to ensure that everything is up to date because times change; we want to make sure that things are still current and make sure that they work for the unique needs of the different tables. But we've almost taken a more tailored approach to it, and -- yeah, I will leave it at that. Thanks.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Member for Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you, the Minister for that. I can appreciate that there is urgency behind this Assembly's Cabinet to settle land claims and to work more efficiently with Indigenous government partners to do so, so -- and I don't want to preclude. Obviously negotiations tables are confidential. But I guess I am just curious at the heart of the matter, like, when was the last time these parameters, these principles, these interests were looked at in wholesale and thought about in this way, or is this the first time in a long time? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thanks to the Member. We'll turn the table to the Minister of EIA.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the principles and interests were looked at in the last government, actually. So it's been relatively recent. We have -- there's also a negotiating mandate, a very detailed negotiating mandate. And there's -- it's divided into chapters, and those chapters are reviewed periodically as well. And so there's some that maybe they haven't been updated in many years, maybe some have been updated a few years ago. So there's a number of different documents that guide this work, and they are reviewed on a regular basis. Thank you.

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

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I highly doubt that the Minister would share all of that with committee. Maybe he would. But is there any sort of summary that can be given to committee to explain this work as it continues and indeed what the end result is? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So when -- in terms of the actual tables, we do provide confidential updates to the Members, quarterly updates with -- they're pretty -- actually pretty descriptive of what's going on. And if you look -- read those every quarter, you will find that you get a good sense of what's happening in there. We've also made the -- sort of a condensed version of the mandate public, and that's -- that was in the last government as well, and that should be posted online, because there was always comments that, you know, we have no mandate. And so there are -- it's pretty solid, concrete mandate items in there that members of the public can go and look at. So a lot of this information actually is out there. Thank you.

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

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

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you to the Member, Great Slave. We shall move on to the Member from the Dehcho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question to the Minister is, can you provide an update to me about the Dehcho process, what's happening there? An update. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you to the Member of Dehcho. To the Minister of EIA.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. So the new federal government and Dehcho have set the goal and the GNWT have agreed to set a goal of June of this year for an agreement-in-principle. And so an agreement-in-principle is not a final agreement, and it might not even include all of the chapters that would be in a final agreement. Some of those can be, you know, left until the future. But an agreement-in-principle is a pretty substantive document that shows a lot of the work that has been done and sort of has been settled. And so the goal is to get that done by June. And, again, there might be some chapters that are outstanding on that. As a government, we have in this budget an additional \$200,000 to put towards negotiators for additional resources for that process. And so I said we don't want to be the ones who are

holding things up, and so we've committed resources towards that as well. I met with just today -- I think it was today -- the President Lafferty from the Fort Providence Metis Nation. Last week I met with the grand chief and the chief negotiator. And so there is work going forward. You know, one of the exciting things about the territory and about land claims and negotiations is that, you know, we get to break new ground up here, and we've been doing that for many -- a number of decades already. And so when we have claims that have been in the process for 25, 30 years, maybe we need to break some new ground on it. And so now we're looking at what's -- to get things moving, what would actually need to happen. And maybe it can happen, maybe it can't but it's worth looking at. So that's the work that we're doing. And I am -- as I said, I am personally digging into this agreement, other agreements, making comparisons, coming up with options. So work is ongoing. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Minister. To the Member from the Dehcho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you. So the agreement-in-principle by June, so do you think we're anywhere near close to some kind of final agreement in the -- I can't say this year, next year. Yeah, that's a question. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Member from the Dehcho. To the Minister.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if I would even venture to take a guess because no one knows when it comes to the land claims. When you have multiple parties involved -- so it's not just us. There's also Canada. And Canada still has some issues that they need to figure out. They need to provide clarity in certain areas, and I think the other partners have been waiting for years for clarity on some of these areas. And so it's tough to get to the end goal when we don't even quite know what path all of us can take together. So there's still some work to be done there.

That being said, even in my meetings with the Dehcho, I do feel a renewed sense of -- I don't want to say hope. But, yeah, optimism and energy towards a final agreement. So I think that we're as close as we've ever been. I can say that, I guess. Thanks.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Minister. To the Member from the Dehcho.

**MRS. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So relationship building and -- and this has been going very well; can the Minister say that? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. So I feel it's been going well. I mean, she'd have to ask the other partners. But I know if I call the grand chief, he'll pick up the phone and vice versa. And I think that's a good start is that we have that trust. You know, we've got to start seeing results and delivering results, and so I don't take that for granted that the trust will just always be there. If I am saying we're going to move ahead and we're not moving ahead, then obviously that's an issue. But I feel as though we have a good relationship, so yes. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you, Minister. Okay, no further questions from the Member. We shall move on to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Sorry, I keep having to sign into my computer with the insanely long password that TSC makes me have. Okay.

**MS. REID:** That was a dig.

**MR. MORSE:** It's not a dig. It's just a commentary on the state of the world in 2026.

Okay. Yeah, I want to thank my colleagues for hitting on the items I was looking to raise as well, and I will try to build on their questions. The first one was -- yeah, we got to the business plan point, and Ms. Reid already asked the question of -- or sorry, the MLA for Great Slave already asked the question about the coordination, and the Premier confirmed that we're a little bit behind on the internal review of GNWT principles and interests. So what I will say to build on that question is just what is the overarching goal and direction that we imagine coming out of that? And to get to the point, is that goal going to be to get the claims settled as quickly as possible as a first priority over others?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of EIA.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. So, I mean, the principles and interests, again, we create these at the beginning of a term. I am not confident that we even need to review them. There's been other things that have overtaken that with tasks that staff have been busy with. And so, you know, after this I will go back and I will have a discussion, do we need to have this in there anymore? Because it doesn't seem to be the holdup. There's other issues that are preventing tables from moving forward, and I haven't pinpointed them, the principles and interests as the holdup there. So the goal is to

settle claims. I don't think that -- you know, you can't say it's over everything else. There's a lot of considerations we have to look at. If it was just an issue of, you know, we'll throw a bunch of money at this situation and that'll fix it, like, we can't just put a billion dollars towards it, right. So we have to look at the other aspects to it. But right now, without land claims, it's hindering development, it's hindering self-determination, self-government, all of those things, and advancing into the future. And so there is a -- it is a priority, a very high priority. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Okay, thank you. I hear that it's a priority. I think that everybody would like to see the results of that priority moving forward. And, you know, I am not going to belabour the point on that one.

The -- I will go back to some -- the conversation that the MLA for Yellowknife North started on the IGCS. So appreciated her raising that point. And I am just going to note that the IGCS has quickly and very quietly become a key function of our government, where our legislation moves through, some of our key policies and programs move through. And when I say quietly, I mean I don't think the public is particularly aware of how significant of a role this table plays in moving our work forward. And I think that that's actually a bit of an issue in a couple of ways.

One is that it is, as far as I am able to tell, operating with pretty minimal resources, and it's not meeting all that frequently, despite the fact that so much is bottlenecked there.

And the other point is that it is operating almost completely behind the curtain, and so it's not something that the public engages with or sees, and yet it is a significant function of where things are moving through the government that the taxpayers are paying for. And, you know, whether they are, you know, on the Indigenous government side or on the side of everybody else. But to those points, I am curious -- well, I guess there's a number of questions that come out of that.

One is, you know, is there consideration to addressing some of the issues that I've raised here? And I will just start with one and go down the list. But the first one is the resources. Is there consideration to resource at the IGCS table more significantly to give it the ability to move things forward in a more timely manner?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So the IGCS meets much more frequently than the IGC. So the elected leaders meet much less often. And I think that's one of the issues. I don't think that -- as the Member said, the public doesn't know what's going on at those tables. I don't think that -- myself included -- leadership is always fully informed of what's happening at that granular level. And that's one of the things that I've been talking about, is how can we have more frequent IGC meetings so that we can ensure we're all on the same page. Because, you know, there's a lot of work to be done and sometimes there might just be some contracted lawyers from Toronto or Vancouver who maybe don't mind if -- you know, if the negotiations continue in perpetuity and they keep racking up billable hours. And not to say that that is what the Members on the IGCS or the -- at the tables are doing. But we just don't know, and we -- that's why I said before, if there was more hours in the day, I would have been more on top of this because, as the Member said, it has become a very significant part of our government, and he has, you know, previously made comments to me that -- on ways that we can improve that process, and those are the types of things that I like to hear because those are the kind of comments that I am bringing to that table so that we can implement those things. So yeah, the Member is right. It's been almost in the shadows a little bit but we need more of a focus on it, and I think all of us, not just the GNWT and the public, but everyone who's involved in this. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely):** Thank you. And I will go back to the Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, you know, to the Premier's credit and to the credit of everyone working at this table, you know, I've had our research team looking into this and confirmed, you know, we're the only government doing this in Canada. This is the only IGCS there is. And so we really -- I often say we're not reinventing the wheel here. Let's just do what other jurisdictions are doing. We don't actually have that referred to in this case. Because we are inventing the wheel and that is not a simple or easy thing to do, but it means that we also need to be in control of this and be the ones that figure out how to make this work efficiently.

Something that's been mentioned to me, I got a chance to speak with somebody that works at the table, and it was mentioned, like have we considered the idea of making the IGC or the IGCS, just the general functions of it, a more independent and properly funded office so that it would be kind of separated from government

a bit, made more public and, I guess, established more officially as a function of government. Because right now it just seems to be operating -- I don't want to say that it's ad hoc because I don't think it is ad hoc, but it is operating, like I've mentioned, in this way that is not very publicly accessible, and I think we're still kind of in the process of figuring out how it's all going to work. So I am wondering if we've thought about establishing it as kind of an independent arm of government in some way. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister for Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. So right now, I believe the Government of the Northwest Territories really sort of fulfills that secretariat role, and there is now discussion about using some of the internal resources to have a more independent, standalone secretariat that is not GNWT but is of the IGC and of those governments. And there's also the Indigenous governments caucus together as well and looking at how they can work more closely together and better in that space. And I think this is all sort of part and parcel of the review. And those conversations are happening in advance of it, and so that's not to say changes couldn't come beforehand, but yes. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And as part of the review, will it be considered whether the work of the IGCS could be made more publicly accountable? So something that the public has access to. Because right now it's all being done behind closed doors. I am sure there are reasons for that, which may or may not be justified, but it is a concern that's been raised by constituents of mine.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. So the IGC does have a website. There are documents on the website. There's communiques. So there is information out there, so it's not completely a shadowy organization. But, again, it's a creation of the devolution agreement. It's the governments who signed on to devolution. And so we are one partner in that, and so I can't really say that we would, you know, be -- open up the doors and make everything public, but I think there is value in the public having a better understanding of the work that the IGC does. And so these are things that I will bring forward to the secretariat to consider incorporating into the terms of reference for that review. And any

other good ideas that Members have, I am happy to bring those forward too. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Next, we will go to the Member for Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I just have one question. But before I start, you know, when this institution was first born in the '60s, MLAs were people that we were not familiar with. Since that time, we have come a long way, so which is good, and it's good to see this department or division dealing with wide variety of issues concerning Indigenous. So I am, you know, quite pleased about that, and I am, you know, grateful -- I mean, I am thankful that, you know, my colleagues are asking, you know, all kinds of questions regarding this division -- within this area. But the questions that I have, you know, we're dealing with a lot of Indigenous issues and, you know -- and just by -- you know, with my colleagues asking all kinds of questions, which is good, and I see here, you know -- you know, I am always talking about decentralizations, and I would like to see, you know, we move forward on decentralizing jobs from Yellowknife to the regions, especially to small communities, especially now with the mine closure. We need jobs. People have to live. There's people outside of the larger regional centres. And you're from outside too and, you know, if you were from Yellowknife I would say do you know that there's people living outside of Yellowknife too. But you do know. You are aware of that. So headquarters, there's headquarters here. Well, it went down from 35 to 34. We're dealing with Indigenous issues. Why all these jobs are situated in the headquarter? I just wanted to ask the Minister if they ever consider moving some of these jobs from headquarters to the region. You know, I don't see Norman Wells. I don't see, you know -- I mean, Tlicho, we're not -- you know, we're waiting to be recognized as a region. So is there a plan in place where, you know, the department is going to -- or the Premier's office is going to focus on decentralizing some of the headquarters position to the region? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of EIA.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So there's not a plan in place right now but there are -- there have been during my time Members of this division who have lived outside of Yellowknife. We now have remote work policy, so if someone is qualified and they're in the territory, I mean they can apply and there's a good chance that they can remain where they are. There are some things, if it's a negotiation team that, you know, works better in close

quarters that you would want to keep together. But we have done that. There have been jobs in other regions, and it's worked, and we're happy to continue to do that. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I am going to go back to the Member from Monfwi here.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Yeah, there's -- he said there's not a plan in place but I would like to see, you know, like, within the -- you know, within the next fiscal year, maybe it's something that we should start focusing on, not only to the larger regional centre. Because I would like to see a lot of these jobs -- like, decentralizing jobs. It's not just the EIA. From all levels, you know, from the department. People in small communities have to live too. And we -- and I've said it quite a few times, working with young people, you know, many of these young people do -- they don't know about some of these other careers except for the mining. Now the mine's closing. I feel sad, you know. I really do feel sad now that, you know, Tlicho just signed a closing ceremony with Diavik. Now there's nothing for them. So we have to give them something to look forward to. And for so long that many of our youth have gone without lots, and this is where I am really, really advocating. I would like to see a lot of these jobs decentralized, moved to the smaller community. No more of this -- what do you call -- like, remote work, you know. And we do have a lot of qualified people. We have a lot of smart people in the regions, all across the Northwest Territories. We shouldn't have to keep saying -- using that excuse that we don't have people, you know. But there's a lot of good people out there. There's a lot of smart people that can do many of these jobs. It's just that we're not giving them a chance because the job is in Yellowknife, and there are -- some of our youth are already intimidated by working within the system. So if we have more jobs there and seeing, you know, their own people working in their jobs, then, I am sure, they will work towards it. But we don't have that capacity. And even now with the social work, you know, with the -- with no more social work program and teacher education program, we don't have too many Indigenous teachers. The Indigenous teachers that we have right now and social worker are close to -- you know, they've done their 20 year service, or maybe more than that, but we have no other young people coming up after them. And if -- you know, like, I mean, that's why I am really -- I would like to see the teacher education program come back and social work. That's where a lot of our young people built their -- like, built their career on, teachers, social worker. And we don't have that. So that's why I am saying, you know, I would

like to see more of the jobs move to smaller communities or regional centres and Tlicho region too. So yeah, it's not a planning place. That's not what I want to hear. I want for the Premier to say, okay, we're going to work on it. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. I will go to the Minister of EIA.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Okay, we're going to work on it. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Thank you. Okay, next I am going to Member for Range Lake for a motion to report progress.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the Chair rise and report progress.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):** Motion on the floor to report progress. The motion is in order and non-debatable. All those in favour? The motion is carried.

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses from the chamber, and we will commence tomorrow.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Member from the Dehcho.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from the Dehcho. Can I have a seconder? You got it, Yellowknife South. She was just putting her hand up waving hard, so. All those in favour? All those opposed? Abstentions?

I think we're going to have to do that again.

All those in favour, put your hands up, please. All those opposed? Those abstentions? Member from Yellowknife Centre, you were not in your seat. Your vote does not count.

Reports of Committee of the Whole. Third Reading of Bills. Orders of the Day, Mr. Clerk.

### Orders of the Day

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Harjot Sidhu):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Friday, February 27th, 2026, at 10 a.m.

1. Prayer or Reflection

2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
  - Oral Question 1071-20(1), Cost of Living
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Acknowledgements
7. Oral Questions
8. Written Questions
9. Returns to Written Questions
  - Written Question 26-20(1), Application of Waters Act Provisions to the Sale or Transfer of Mining Assets
  - Written Question 28-20(1), Medical Travel
  - Written Question 30-20(1), Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority Action Plans
  - Written Question 31-20(1), Prenatal, Pregnancy, and Postpartum Costs
  - 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
10. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
11. Petitions
12. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
13. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
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
20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

- Bill 3-20(1), Carbon Tax Repeal 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 Friday, February 27th, 2026, at 10 a.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 7:55 p.m.