



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
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The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Wednesday, May 29, 2024****Members Present**

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

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Shane Thompson):

Colleagues, I'd like to thank Theresa Etchinelle for the opening guiding words. As you saw today, we had a new deputy sergeant-at-arms, Mr. Mike Butt, and welcome to you doing your first Mace trip in here, so thank you very much. Give him a hand.

---Applause

Ministers' statements. Minister of Infrastructure.

Ministers' Statements

**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 36-20(1):
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES AIRPORT
IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS**

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, transportation infrastructure projects play an important role in the economic landscape of the Northwest Territories, providing business and employment opportunities while serving the essential needs of our residents. The Northwest Territories' 27 airports are the lifeline of the North, connecting communities, moving people and essential goods, providing access to critical services like health care, and are crucial during emergencies and evacuations for both residents and responders. We also know that many rely heavily on our airports, particularly in the areas of exploration and tourism. Today I would like to highlight some of the Department of Infrastructure's recent work to improve our Northwest Territories' airports and ensure safety across the territory. Airport improvement projects support a number of GNWT priorities: They provide opportunities for a strong economic foundation and access to health care, work to address climate change related concerns, and contribute to the safety of our residents and communities. To date, the Department of Infrastructure has received approximately \$50 million dollars in Airport Capital Assistance Program, or ACAP, funding for 17 different projects at 11 different airports.

ACAP funding was received for a new loader and asphalt surfaces overlay in Fort Smith, and for an airfield electrical replacement in Fort Simpson. Through the capital plan, drainage improvements were completed at Samba K'e and Sachs Harbour Airports, with phase 2 drainage work scheduled for this year in Fort McPherson. In Yellowknife, ACAP funding made it possible to modernize equipment, creating a safer and more efficient work environment. Further north, I am pleased to share that the Inuvik Airport runway extension is well underway, with material extraction almost 90 percent complete, and runway widening nearing the 80 percent completion mark. Eighty-three Northwest Territories residents are currently working on this project, which is providing both local employment and training opportunities. Building this airport infrastructure is key to improving the presence of Canadian Armed Forces to assert sovereignty across the Arctic.

The replacement of the terminal building in Inuvik is still in the works. The Department of Infrastructure is currently updating the construction cost estimates and securing the additional financial investment needed to advance this project. I am pleased to report that we have received significant local interest in undertaking this work.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT is updating the development plan for Fort Simpson Airport. In March 2024, a public meeting took place in Fort Simpson to present the plan and obtain feedback. Residents were invited to share their thoughts on the GNWT's engagement portal. The plan, which will provide recommendations, analysis, and policies for future development, is expected to be finalized by the end of June.

Yellowknife is using its revolving fund to make several airport improvements. A geotechnical study on both runways is looking at solutions to best address and repair issues related to runway movement due to climate change. This work will be considered and prioritized into the Capital Improvement Plan currently under development. Accessibility upgrades have been made inside the terminal building, including pet relief stations and hearing

induction loops, a special type of sound system for use by folks who use hearing aids. A tar machine and a rapid intervention vehicle were also purchased this year. Upcoming upgrades include replacing airport seating in the food court and Arrivals B area, a new passenger processing system for airlines, pre-board screening upgrades and asphalt overlays on two taxiways.

Mr. Speaker, the Yellowknife Airport's first strategic plan is currently being drafted and will be an action-oriented document that identifies future development in a practical, economical, and environmentally sustainable manner. It will include a capital improvement program and outline processes for identifying, planning, and implementing capital projects at the airport. We recently extended an invitation to meet with the airlines for a unique opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the airport's significance, ongoing developments, and future initiatives. This kind of participation is crucial as we strive to foster transparency, collaboration, and a shared vision for the continued success of Yellowknife Airport, which is a hub to all other NWT regions. To promote accountability and oversight, the strategic plan will be made public and will include key performance indicators on monitoring progress, evaluating results, and reporting.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT continues to make significant investments in our airports and I look forward to providing successful improvement project updates at future sittings. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 38-20(1):
NON-INSURED HEALTH BENEFITS
AGREEMENT WITH CANADA

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, I want to provide the House with an update on the negotiations and discussions with the Government of Canada on the delivery of the federal Non-Insured Health Benefits Program. This is a national program available to eligible First Nations and Inuit residents.

In the NWT, portions of the program are administered by the GNWT on behalf of Indigenous Services Canada, through a contribution agreement. Through this agreement, the Department of Health and Social Services is responsible for coordination of medical travel, arranging access to dental care and vision care services, and assisting with access to medical supplies and equipment for clients of the program.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Health and Social Services entered into a new agreement with Indigenous Services Canada at the end of last fiscal year. This two-year agreement provides annual funding of \$47.1 million for last year and this year. Of this amount, \$22.9 million is allocated for Non-Insured Health Benefits Program delivery, while \$24.2 million is intended to offset additional medical travel costs for eligible First Nations and Inuit residents in the Northwest Territories. While this new agreement provides a substantial increase in funding, there remains a significant shortfall to meet the full costs of the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program delivery. The terms of the agreement still do not hold Indigenous Services Canada responsible for the full cost of providing Non-Insured Health Benefits to eligible Northwest Territories residents.

The GNWT has reiterated to the federal government that its role is solely in administering Indigenous Services Canada's Non-Insured Health Benefits Program in the Northwest Territories. This should not affect the federal government's responsibility for Non-Insured Health Benefits for Indigenous residents, nor should it be seen as the GNWT assuming responsibility for costs associated with the program. Fully funding the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program in the Northwest Territories NWT would also potentially remove barriers to Indigenous governments wishing to pursue the administration of Non-Insured Health Benefits for their own beneficiaries and citizens in the future.

Historic and current arrangements between the federal government and the GNWT around the provision of medical travel and the administration of the non-insured health benefits have resulted in policy and funding gaps that are complicated to resolve. Resolving these foundational issues is an essential first step in making improvements to the delivery of medical travel in the Northwest Territories and addressing concerns with other non-insured health benefits areas such as dental services.

Mr. Speaker, over the last year and a half, issues related to Non-Insured Health Benefits Program have been regularly discussed with the Northwest Territories Council of Leaders. Council members have taken a united position in advocating for Indigenous Services Canada to accept its responsibility for the full cost of this program and to ensure that non-insured health benefit-eligible residents receive the full benefits afforded to them through this program. Their support has been instrumental in moving this issue forward with Canada, and I am committed to continuing to collaborate with Indigenous leadership on this important work.

To initiate the next round of negotiations I, along with the Tlicho Grand Chief and the President of the Northwest Territories Metis Nation, met with both Minister Holland and then met with Minister of Indigenous Services Canada Hajdu to discuss our concerns with the current non-insured health benefits agreement. We have agreed to work toward a draft agreement that closes the funding gap and addresses outstanding issues by the fall of 2024.

Mr. Speaker, I am committed to pursuing a new approach to engaging with the Government of Canada, working with Indigenous government leadership, to ensure the federal government upholds its responsibilities to non-insured health benefit-eligible residents, and to working towards a streamlined coordination of services that benefit all the Northwest Territories residents. Thank you. Koana. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Very good Minister's statement. Speaker happy.

Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 201-20(1): MEDICAL TRAVEL FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, travelling for medical appointments in smaller communities in the Beaufort Delta can take a toll on patients, either to follow up for appointments for routine procedures or for a more serious condition. Both physically and mentally, we are all aware of the toll it takes. Now, Mr. Speaker, imagine if you are an elder and English is your second language and you're from a small community in the Beaufort Delta, having an escort to assist you is essential. Mr. Speaker, I've heard too many times that the onerous paperwork and bureaucracy to have an escort approved is often stressful as the travel itself.

Mr. Speaker, I hate to use the term "no brainer", Mr. Speaker, but if you are an 80-year-old elder from Sachs Harbour, or a community in the Beaufort Delta, I think we can all agree that an escort should be automatically in the travel man if you must travel to Yellowknife, Inuvik, or Edmonton. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the Beaufort Delta's not the only region that has experienced this concern. I'm sure my colleagues from the Sahtu or Tlicho can likely say the same.

I understand policies must be in place but, Mr. Speaker, there must be a way of making this process easier for our elders so at least the one

thing that they and their family do not have to worry about when it could be one of the most difficult times of their lives. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 202-20(1): MEDICAL TRAVEL

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, it's not only Northerners from smaller communities or remote regions, it's also Yellowknifers who have to deal with the medical travel system that isn't serving their needs.

Last October, one of my constituents went to Stanton Hospital because he was having trouble breathing where it was discovered he had a heart attack. He was sent to Edmonton the next day but on the way developed pneumonia and a blood infection. For a month, he was sedated with a breathing tube but despite the support of his doctor, his spouse was denied medical travel. Imagine how she felt with her husband that way, the doctors having told her that his health could depend on her presence, only to be flatly turned down. The staff at Stanton and the Royal Alex did their very best and thankfully the constituent recovered in time, but his spouse needed to take \$6,000 out of their retirement savings so she could provide assistance and learn how to care for him once he returns to Yellowknife. This put his family and her through strain and anxiety while he fought for his life hundreds of kilometers away.

Mr. Speaker, by forcing escorts to pay their own way and for their own hotels when a loved one is in a medical emergency, we are abandoning the values of public health care. Worse yet, we are putting patients at risk when their escorts are denied, and they require someone to make decisions on their behalf. Regardless of its medical treatment, if medical treatment is scheduled or it is due to an emergency, escorts can be essential because they possess vital knowledge of a patient that may be required to understand a plan of care, yet our policies -- policymakers seem to think differently. The policies that are in place that are preventing medical escorts for emergent care when it's necessary, like the case I described, are cruel, Mr. Speaker. Yes, budgets are tight and medical travel is an expensive service but rationalizing services should not result in irrational policies that pick and choose who gets helped. I know of other instances where constituents were essentially compelled to bring escorts unnecessarily or patients who could have been treated virtually here in the North for a fraction of the expense are sent

down south anyway. We can do better but the way -- where we need to save costs is not in emergency situations. We need a Minister who will fix this broken system and stop putting patients' lives at risk. And later today, I hope that I find one. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 203-20(1):
HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in a very real way, people are our health care system, and how the dedicated professionals who make up the system are compensated and treated is a major factor in the NWT's health care crisis. I stand with nurses and all workers to have fair and sustainable wages and benefits. To have a resourceful, sustainable, and thriving community, we need to be healthy, and we desperately need health care workers to be proud to work in the NWT health care system that treats them with respect and values their contributions. Nurses, and all our health care workers, are struggling to pick up the pieces from the pandemic, and the employer has not truly valued them for their service. I believe that the retention of experienced nurses and health care workers is important to all unionized workers.

As past president of UNW Local 40, I heard health care workers' concerns voiced at the bargaining conference in the summer of 2022 where the union collectively chose to stand for those workers in this round of bargaining. I am hopeful that the mediator will help this round of bargaining come to a fair conclusion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 204-20(1):
ILLICIT DRUG TRADE

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the sharp increase in drug crime cross the North is having a severe impact on my constituents, and I know my colleagues in this Assembly are struggling to handle this crisis as well. Drugs are flowing up from Alberta through South Slave and eventually distributed into every region of the Northwest Territories. No matter how remote or isolated our communities may be, these drugs seem to find their way in one way or another from the southern borders. These illegal activities bring in violence into our communities, results in

health emergencies and overdose, tear families apart, and corrupt our children. They drain our communities of wealth, both financially and culturally.

When I visit my communities, I want to see my constituents on the land developing important skills and providing for themselves and their family. Instead, I see too many throwing their health away as they fall into this trap that these drug dealers lay for illegal profit. We all have many dedicated RCMP members working hard every day to stop the drug trade, but they need more support especially in the South Slave communities where police resources are stretched thin. One vital piece of support they need is a dedicated K-9 unit of trained dogs and handlers that can intercept these drugs before they reach their distribution.

The South Slave RCMP had government funding for a K-9 unit over the year for ten years but over time, these services have been lost. Mr. Speaker, a K-9 based in Yellowknife is not enough. We want to get a handle on the situation. We need to restore our funding for K-9 units in the South Slave based in Hay River and not just for the sake of my community but to help the RCMP across the North because that is where we can catch large quantities of illicit substance before they are scattered in a dozen different direction in the North. I look forward to asking the Minister of Justice about restoring the K-9 unit funding in the South Slave region this afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 205-20(1):
CLIMATE CHANGE

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all have been impacted by climate change, directly or indirectly. Direct impacts of climate change are the effects of rising temperatures on the earth's natural system. Everyone will experience the effects of these direct impacts, but these impacts will affect some areas more than others. The Northwest Territories and its residents are feeling and seeing the effects of global warming.

Mr. Speaker, the Arctic region is warming four times faster than the rest of the world. The Northwest Territories is already warmed 2 to 4 degrees Celsius since recordkeeping in the 1950s. It is noted that 6 degrees Celsius of warming would lead to drastic changes in the way the North looks, feels, and sustains life.

Natural Resources Canada says changes can deeply impact the people who live in it the North

and rely on the land. It also states the speed of changes outpacing our existence has to need to adapt.

Mr. Speaker, Indigenous peoples live in close connections with the land therefore they are more directly affected by climate change. Consequently, climate change disasters hinder their ability to practice their Indigenous rights and alters the transmission of their traditional knowledge. In addition, Indigenous peoples interpret and react to impacts of climate change in creative ways, drawing on traditional knowledge and other technologies to find solutions which may help society and large cope with impending changes.

Mr. Speaker, education can encourage people to change their attitudes and behaviours. It also helps them to make decisions. In the classroom, young people can be taught the impacts of global warming, learn how to adapt to climate change. Education empowers people, but especially motivates the young to take action.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have questions for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change at the appropriate time.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 206-20(1):
ILLICIT DRUG TRADE IMPACT AND
PREVENTION MEASURES

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Drugs and addictions workshop in the youth conference. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the urgent substance misuse and drug crisis devastating our communities across the Northwest Territories and Sahtu region. Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of attending the substance misuse and drug crisis meeting in Fort Good Hope April 30th to May 1st organized by the Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated. The meeting brought together leaders, elders, youth, and the community members to openly discuss the challenges that plague their communities and develop a plan moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, the consensus was very clear. We need immediate action on the multiple fronts to stop illegal drugs and support those struggling with addictions. The Sahtu demands a comprehensive approach, including increased law enforcement, drug education, expanded addictions treatment, and more economic opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, we heard heart-wrenching and very emotional stories of lives lost and families and suffering. The impacts on our peoples' health is immeasurable. We cannot allow this crisis to continue unchecked. Mr. Speaker, I call upon this government to partner with the Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated and our community leaders to implement strategy in working, or developed in stages, including more resources for RCMP officers, drug education in schools, local addiction counsellors, and treatment options. And, Mr. Speaker, investments in job training and business development.

Mr. Speaker, Tulita will host the next SSI youth life promotional conference June 3rd to June 6th to build on work started in Fort Good Hope. I give notice on my attendance. Our future leaders must be commended. I request unanimous consent to conclude my statement, Mr. Speaker.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. And mahsi, colleagues. Mr. Speaker, the Sahtu is resilient, but we need the full commitment of the Government of the Northwest Territories to combat this drug crisis, build healthier, and must regain our traditional values and build safer communities. Mr. Speaker, we cannot lose one more life to illegal drugs. I urge all Members to support the Sahtu substance misuse and drug crisis plan. Together, we can heal our communities and create a brighter future. Mahsi.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 207-20(1):
OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S LAWYER

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Office of the Children's Lawyer was established in the NWT in 2011. And since around 2017, it has been under the umbrella of the Legal Aid Commission, which is an independent government agency. It ensures that children can be provided with their own lawyer to represent them directly, and this often involves children in care. It is based on principles outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child. When the government or anyone makes decisions about what is in a child's best interest, the views and wishes of that child need to be carefully considered and understood.

Children in care sometimes have negative and difficult relationships with their case workers, so those children can turn to a lawyer to advocate for them. But lawyers who take on this work

face really challenging legal and ethical issues. These roster lawyers in turn need guidance from the Office of the Children's Lawyer, and that office needs to be managed by a lawyer with extensive relevant experience and an understanding of the needs of children at various ages and stages of development. Other staff within Legal Aid do not have that specific expertise.

At times, the OCL lawyer has taken on cases themselves but, beyond that, their role includes the following:

- Advocating about children's legal rights to HSS, schools, families, judges, and to other lawyers;
- Advocating for systemic change to the child and family services process, including changes to the Child and Family Services Act;
- Vetting, training, and mentoring lawyers who are assigned to children;
- Monitoring lawyers who are assigned to children's cases and responding to complaints about them; and
- Keeping the OCL manual and code of conduct for lawyers up to date.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the OCL lawyer has recently retired. If no one else takes on those roles and responsibilities, children will be worse off because the legal assistance being provided to them will be compromised. I do not believe this Assembly wants to let that happen. So at the appropriate time, I will have questions for the Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Oral questions. Member from Monfwi.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 208-20(1):
RECOGNITION OF CABINET'S
COMMITMENT TO WORKING WITH
INDIGENOUS GOVERNMENTS

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, [translation unavailable] on May 16, 2024, [translation unavailable].

So, Mr. Speaker, the GNWT held their bilateral meeting with the Tlicho government on May 16, 2024. Together, the GNWT and Tlicho government are working to improve mental health and addictions, build infrastructure, Tlicho jurisdiction in education, Tlicho involvement in emergency management, continually improve co-management of wildlife. I want to take this time to acknowledge the good

work of this Cabinet to improve relations with Indigenous government and to take actions that improve the lives of Indigenous people across the territory.

I want to acknowledge the work of the Premier. He has been proactive and made good on his word to improve relations with Indigenous government. Since his time in Cabinet, the Premier has sought the advice of Indigenous government and made himself available and accessible. This is a true leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to acknowledge the efforts of Minister of health. The Minister of health has worked her way from the front lines caring directly for people's health to now directing the department of health. For other Indigenous -- as an Indigenous leader and leaders, I want to say to her, we recognize -- we recognize her good work, the good work that she is doing. We recognize you are young, you are Indigenous, and we have great faith in what you can do for the government and the people of the Northwest Territories. We know that you truly want to improve the health of the residents of the NWT. We support you as you move forward to do this. Mr. Speaker, we recognize the work the Minister is doing to improve midwifery and address the health care workers shortages. We know that the North depends on agency nurses. People in small communities know what it feels like to have a nursing station shut down because there is no one to work it. We recognize not everything can be improved all at once, but we acknowledge the Minister is taking steps in the right directions. Thank you to the Premier, the Minister of health, and to the Cabinet for their efforts to truly work together with Indigenous government. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 209-20(1):
ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the NWT Human Rights Commission recently presented its 2022-2023 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Government Operations. In keeping with trends noted in previous reports, the commission noted that disabilities were the basis for 59 percent of complaints brought before them. The commission went on to highlight that there is a gap between the National Building Code standards for accessibility and an organization's responsibility to provide accessible spaces and accommodation under the NWT Human Rights Act.

In past responses to commission recommendations that this gap be addressed through changes to or introduction of new legislation, the Department of Infrastructure has responded that they do not have a mandated responsibility for accessibility standards.

Mr. Speaker, the Human Rights Commission does not stand alone in calling for this change. Many residents living with disabilities and advocates have spoken up on this issue. The city of Yellowknife has called for accessibility legislation or a building act which addresses accessibility standards. I am not satisfied with the government continuing to state they are not mandated to step in on this issue, Mr. Speaker. Over 22 percent of the population in the NWT is living with a disability. I argue that the government does have a mandated responsibility to ensure that these residents are provided equal opportunity to participate in society as fully as any NWT resident.

Mr. Speaker, when I was campaigning, one conversation I had with a constituent stood out to me on this matter. They pointed out to me that as well as it being a moral responsibility to work towards an equitable society, it also has real impacts on our economy and social fabric when persons living with disabilities leave the territory because accessibility is better in other jurisdictions. At a time when we are trying to attract residents to move here and stay, this is one more thing we can do to help make the territory a more attractive place to live. I would advocate for us to take the lead here when in fact several Canadian jurisdictions already have accessibility legislation, so we won't be charting a new path. We will simply be keeping up with the pack. Let's step up and get this done because soon we will find ourselves in a position of being left behind. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 210-20(1):
CONGRATULATIONS TO DEHCHO
GRADUATES

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today's statement I wanted to honour and provide congratulations to Dehcho residents who will be graduated and obtaining either their grade 12 diploma or a degree from their post-secondary studies.

Mr. Speaker, the names of these individuals, their achievement, and the institutions they're graduating from include:

- Kelly Leishman from Fort Providence is obtaining a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a degree in drawing from the University of Alberta;
- Annadette Bouvier who is obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Vancouver;
- Anonda Canadian is obtaining a diploma in Indigenous Digital Film Program from Capilano University;
- Paris Levavasseur is obtaining her grade 12 GED in the Indigenous Bridging Program at Mount Royal University, and Paris is now enrolled in her first year of a psychology degree;
- Marie Buggins, a K'atlodeeche member is graduating from grade 12 at Diamond Jenness School;. and
- Ronnell Landry is obtaining a nursing degree from Aurora College.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all of the people of the Dehcho, I want to give a big congratulations to each of these graduates for putting in the work, being dedicated, and succeeding in advancing their education. It's always a wonderful thing to see people achieve milestones like this in their lives, especially Indigenous people from the North like this.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to wish all other graduates from across the NWT a warm congratulations for their achievement. I know that the families, communities, and educators of all northern graduates are proud of you and proud of this moment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 211-20(1):
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the NGOs out there are the real super heroes. They may not wear capes or have special rings, they don't fly invisible jets, but they are a beacon of hope. Sometimes they're the only light out there in the dark.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to taking responsibilities, the government doesn't want to get its hands dirty, who does it call? An NGO, Mr. Speaker.

Now, we shouldn't view NGOs as they continually be as the agency of last report. Take the Yellowknife Sobering Centre, Mr. Speaker.

When it was ran by an NGO, they were capped at under \$800,000 a year. When the GNWT runs it, they funded over \$3 million a year, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that example alone is demonstrating the government supports those in the NGO industry not to have a living wage. Mr. Speaker, I envision -- this is an example -- that the finance Minister is out there daydreaming as the day goes on in a -- dreaming of the Mel Lastman style of pitch for NGOs, kind of like bad boys out on the street. Some NGO who's financially hungry and desperate for any opportunity, they've got sandwich boards on, they're saying -- and pop-up balloons saying they will do trauma supports for cheap, Mr. Speaker. Two-for-one Tuesday for trauma, Mr. Speaker. They are -- NGOs are so desperate they'll take any opportunity they can.

Now, that is a fictitious example. But I worked in the NGO sector. They are desperate for real respect and financial supports. Mr. Speaker, there's just no way we can keep letting them feel this way because they truly are the cornerstone of some of our social programs. An NGO carries a financial burden in ways the government cannot or will not. Mr. Speaker, their funding does not allow them to pay for the rent, their staff, and all their program needs fairly and reasonably. The Yellowknife Sobering Centre example is exactly the example that hurts them. Any money they have left over at the end of the year, Mr. Speaker, gets clawed back so they can't have vision. They can't tell their employees that they are planning for the future. It's literally month to month for many of these people.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, we need sustainable funding for NGOs. They need to be treated with respect. They need inflationary and multi-year agreements, because they matter. And without them, we would be lost. Mr. Speaker, hurray for the NGOs. I am here for them, and I have no doubt all our good Members here support them as well. Cheers.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 212-20(1):
RON COOK CELEBRATION OF LIFE

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Colleagues, today I would like to share with you an individual who had a huge impact on my life personally and professionally. The person I am talking about is Ronald Leslie William Cook.

Ron was born on July 15, 1942 to Fred and Irene Cook on a picnic day in Grahamdale, Manitoba. Ron loved the outdoors on the family's homestead in Steep Rock, Manitoba,

watching birds, chasing squirrels as a child, and was very interested in all-things nature. He loved watching seeds grow, eventually becoming an avid gardener and stocking the family's larder with fruit and produce. Ron developed a love for team sports in his teen years including baseball and curling.

Now, I am going to fast forward to when Ron arrived in Hay River as a social worker. Then Ron managed the Hay River Housing Corporation for two years and in 1981, he took a job running the local arena before the town had even created a recreation department. Ron was always a community person who loved working together with the people. He further developed minor hockey, as well as minor league softball and curling. Hay River hosted the mixed territorial curling championships when the lounge was only the community's arena dressing room number 1. There are stories about how they made a makeshift floor on the top of the pool area for temporary fantastic lounge for an entire winter. Eventually, Ron was hired as the town recreation director.

Colleagues, I would like to share a few stories about Ron. When I was a young lad, I would go and watch ball down at the Don Wright ball park. Ron played right field for the Hay River team. He was a very strong player but, more importantly, it was about the team. As I said previously, he helped develop the sport of softball in Hay River and this helped me enjoy the sport to this day. He was about developing young people into strong citizens. It was about working hard, having fun, and enjoying your teammates and the other team.

In 1984, I was in university and I reached out to Ron to see if we could develop a summer program for the town. I shared some of my ideas with him and about the importance of a summer program. About a month later, he reached out to me and advised me that he liked the idea and he would be implementing the program that summer. What I found so exciting was that he expanded it and there were four camps spread across Hay River that year. I was fortunate to be one of the camp leaders that year.

I have to say that because of him, I started to look at the recreation field as an option. I can tell you that I had the pleasure of working with him for over 15 plus years. With this in mind, I would like to have the rest of the statement deemed as read. Colleague, he will be missed by his family and friends, but I know he is in a better place. God Bless you, Ron.

Colleagues, as I was entering the recreation field, I had the opportunity to serve with Ron on the NWTRPA board. He had a strong vision on

what he felt the recreation field should look like for the NWT. Like all good leaders, he would bring the best out of people especially when it came to getting visions from folks.

In 1992, I moved to Fort Simpson as the recreation development officer. One of the jobs was to get community recreation coordinators together to share ideas and come up with regional programs. I reached out to Ron to see if he could be part of it. After a couple of years of asking him, he was able to fit the next meeting into his busy schedule. At that meeting, he listened, offered some advice, and enjoyed the time spent with all the regional recreation coordinators. After the three days of meetings, he said that he was looking forward to the next meeting.

As I was telling his wife Gale in one of the meetings, Ron shared an issue with the group. The recreation coordinator from Jean Marie River spoke up after Ron described the issue and provided him with a possible solution. Ron got excited. This of course, confused the JMR recreation coordinator and he said sorry. Ron apologized to him and said he had the right solution and the reason he was excited was because he now had the solution to the issue. After that, Ron was sold on the Mackenzie Recreation Association.

I can tell you this was someone I enjoyed talking with and asking for ideas and solutions as we moved forward. As Gale use to joke, the Ben Sivertz Arena was surely his second home.

Colleagues toward the end of his career, Ron became interested in trails as "it is a healthy outlet for people's exercise" and was the driving force behind the 2001 Trans-Canada Trail relay in the community. Part of his vision is the trail in the community of Hay River. I can tell you, I have had the pleasure of walking on it a number of times.

Ron served two terms as a town councillor before becoming the recreation coordinator. Until he and the family left, he was involved in the Baptist Church, the Kiwanis Club, and the Curling Club. As well, he was involved with the Mackenzie Recreation Association, the NWTRPA, and NWT Curling Association. As a competitive athlete, Ron competed at the national level for curling three times (1997-2002) in both mixed and seniors' competition.

I forgot to say, when he was 16 years old Ron relocated to Regina to complete his grade 12 and begin his post-secondary schooling at Briercrest, Saskatchewan. Following that, he went to Bethel College in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and then he obtained his Master of

Social Work from the University of British Columbia.

As a young boy, Ron put this trust in his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and never missed an opportunity to share the good news of God's love and grace. Ron loved to visit people and discuss sports, politics, and theology. I can tell you that growing up, I enjoyed spending Friday evenings as a young teenager with the youth group he was part of.

Over the years, upon leaving Hay River, Ron needed medical and surgical assistance along the way and the family was very thankful to the Almighty God for his best provisions on Ron's life path. The family firmly believed that the many, many prayer warriors help lift Ron and the family to God for help in the times of need. The family wished to express their sincere thanks for all the medical and prayer support they received.

In closing, I would like to quote Psalm 18:2: "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge." Until we meet again, RIP Ron.

Members' statements. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Replies to the Budget Address. Member for Monfwi.

Replies to the Budget Address

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTONG'S REPLY

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: It's not that bad. It's mostly for small communities and regional centres, that we have lots of people living in the regional centres as well that are affected.

So, Mr. Speaker, on Friday the 2024-2025 Budget was tabled with a \$2.2 billion operating budget. The Minister states: This is a practical and realistic budget aimed at reducing our overall expenditures in 2024-2025 to help restore balance and increase our fiscal capacity to deal with unexpected events.

The Minister also states this budget is about value and efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, I understand we are in a time of fiscal restraint. We need to reduce our debt, and we have to be very careful with our spending. We have dealt with COVID, floods and fires which has cost the GNWT a lot of money. The cost of delivering goods and services in the NWT is challenging and continues to increase. We don't know what this upcoming fire season will bring.

The GNWT needs to meaningfully support local economic development. We need to grow our local economy to build local resilience. The government should be putting money towards actions that will improve the lives of residents in small communities and regional centres and improve the capacity of local communities because this strengthens the territory overall.

Mr. Speaker, the people in my riding make up 6 percent of the territorial population and represents four of the 33 communities. In the Tlicho region, like many small communities in the NWT, there are significant challenges to address.

For a long time, our small communities have fallen below the regional centres like Yellowknife when looking at outcomes in education, health, income, employment, labour, mental health, housing, and the list goes on. At this rate, the small communities will never have equitable services for our residents. And now, Mr. Speaker, our small communities are in a fight for survival against drugs and crime. The increase of drugs and criminal activity in small communities across the NWT has mostly been a silent killer, but the illegal activities of the drug trades are increasing and becoming more overt and quite apparent in the smaller communities. We don't seem to be acknowledging or properly addressing the crisis this brings into our communities. And this is my concern with the budget.

Mr. Speaker, I don't see how this budget is going to improve the lives of residents in small communities and other regional centres. Our communities need us to put money behind our words. If we are a government that wants to improve the lives of residents in small communities, then it would be reflected in our territorial budget. In this budget, there is not enough focus on prevention.

Our children and youth in small communities need hope. They need to have positive and healthy outlets for them to spend their time. They need modern and safe infrastructure and facilities to play sports and do cultural activities, and these facilities need operational funding to ensure programming and organized games and other healthy activities can be scheduled regularly for them.

Mr. Speaker what will children and youth do if they don't have positive outlets to do sports and recreation? We have organized crime infiltrating our communities, corrupting our youth, destroying families, and disrupting our way of life. Our focus should be on ensuring children and youth in small communities are safe and healthy with a future to look forward to.

Providing sports and recreation activities enables a positive path for our youth as we combat against high-risk behaviour. Support the small communities to ensure children and youth have consistent outlets in sport and recreation. This budget needs an increase in sport and recreation funding, specifically to support youth and small communities.

Mr. Speaker, we also know that our communities face a funding gap. For several years, municipal and community governments have been underfunded to operate and provide services. The government of the 19th Assembly did increase \$5 million in funding for municipalities, but we know, Mr. Speaker, there are tens of millions of dollars still shortchanging our communities.

By increasing the funding for municipalities, it will not just improve the financial sustainability of communities, but the benefits will multiply throughout the community. By increasing funding to communities, the GNWT will create more local jobs, more local contracts services, and improve programs and services for local residents.

The capital city holds almost half of the population of the NWT, which includes headquarters for both the territorial and federal government. It is the hub for most mining activity in the NWT and contains the biggest portion of the private sector. So in the capital city, there are much more services, programs, and opportunity for people. Overall, life is good in the capital city. Many families can afford nice homes and fill their kitchen with food, their kids receive a good education and a have a higher likelihood to graduate, and they can play a variety of sports, there is health care and RCMP services. In the capital city there is opportunity. But, Mr. Speaker, what about the rest of the territory?

Well, Mr. Speaker, for the rest of the territory, the small communities are used to making do with fewer resources. Consider, for example, the midwifery funding for Yellowknife that is being reallocated. Well, with all due respect, Mr. Speaker, I know that the \$900,000 for that Yellowknife-based program can be used somewhere else. Moreover, also on the topic of health care, I want to comment on agency nurses.

Mr. Speaker, I know that there are several Members here who want to eliminate entirely the usage of these agency nurses within the NWT. However, Mr. Speaker, I am unsure whether the NWT will ever be able to completely cut the usage of agency nurses across all communities. Because if we did, then some small community health centres would be

left sitting empty and unused and they'd eventually close completely, which would put our communities' safety at risk and leave no health professionals present at all. That can never happen, Mr. Speaker.

This brings me to my next point about cuts, Mr. Speaker. I am speaking specifically about the cuts to the Fort Smith Correctional Centre. Are these cuts the beginning of broader cuts for other regional centres and small communities? What will they cut in next year's budget, or during the rest of the 20th Assembly? I guess we will wait and see.

Our small communities are deteriorating on top of underfunded budgets, rising costs of inflation, and rising costs of goods and services. They are fighting an increase of violence and crime and are increasingly having to respond to emergencies and natural disasters.

The biggest form of support the GNWT can provide to communities to increase their local economy, to increase social programs and services, to provide more opportunities for residents, and improve the lives of residents in small communities is to put the money directly into the hands of communities. This budget needs to increase funding for municipalities.

The support that ECE has in place, such as the Small Community Employment Fund, is an excellent program that supports communities to hire summer students in a variety of local positions. This budget line needs to be increased.

Another way to support small communities is through decentralization, transfer of jobs and services away from the capital. In the past, the government has recognized the value of moving jobs and services into the regions and smaller communities but in this budget, I don't see decentralization happening.

Overall, the government has reduced some positions for this fiscal year but, Mr. Speaker, the value of moving jobs into the regions has been overlooked. Decentralization can stimulate growth in communities. We need to focus services where the service is needed most. The GNWT should have positions and services transferred into small communities for this budget.

Mr. Speaker, I represent four small communities in the NWT. I come from a small community so I've seen firsthand the challenges our communities face. We know that many families, as their children get older, they leave our small communities. It is not uncommon for families to relocate to regional centres so their kids receive a better education and have more opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, people also leave because some don't feel safe as they once did. Our homes and communities are not the same places they used to be. There is minimal programs and services, little opportunities for jobs, and our youth have too much free time on their hands which makes them vulnerable and more likely to get into trouble and be negatively influenced. Our small communities need the attention and focus of this government to ensure all children, no matter where they live in the NWT, to have equitable access to opportunities by investing in:

- Sports and recreation;
- The municipal funding gap; and
- Enhancing small community employment programs.

We are supporting small communities. These are areas, Mr. Speaker, that I want to see the budget improve. I have spoken many times about housing. We are in a housing crisis in the NWT. We have overcrowded, unrepaired, and deteriorating units. We have people homeless and couch surfing. Housing is another major issue why people aren't living in small communities and why people are actually moving out of small communities because there is simply nowhere to live. It is surprising that the overall Housing NWT budget is reduced compared to last year, given the state of housing in the territory. How is the GNWT going to improve the state of public housing units or build the units needed in communities with a reduced budget? The GNWT knows the cost of addressing core need in the NWT is approximately \$300 million in capital and \$18 million in ongoing operational funding. Mr. Speaker, how will the GNWT bring the units it has out of core need with a reduced budget?

We need to increase homeownership in the NWT to reduce the demand on public housing, yet these budget lines are reduced. The Homeownership Entry Level Market Housing Program and the Homeownership Assistance Programs are reduced. How is the GNWT going to increase homeownership?

I would also like to know how many units Housing NWT will sell to clients over 2024-2025. Housing has many older units that could be sold to clients at prices clients could afford. This will increase homeownership and reduce the burden on housing to maintain them. I want to see the budget provide more focus on housing supports, specifically for small communities, to fix up the public housing units that exist and to support and expand homeownership. I recognize the housing Minister is formalizing relations with Indigenous

governments in regards to housing, and this will support creative solutions. This is positive.

I am concerned, however, that the budget that is required to fix up the units currently operated by Housing NWT is insufficient, and this is among my biggest concerns with this budget. I would like to see more resources towards housing to ensure that our residents, those especially in smaller communities, have a safe, affordable, accessible, and suitable home.

These are my priority issues for the budget that I would like to see improved. These are changes that will meaningfully improve life for those in small communities, and this should be the priority of the GNWT, to help those most in need. Mashicho. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Replies to the Budget Address.

Colleagues, I'm going to go back to number 5, recognition of visitors in the gallery. I was a little quick to get to number 6. Member from Nunakput.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery (Reversion)

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize for my hand being late. You were pretty quick. I just want to have an opportunity today to recognize Beverly Amos. Beverly here is visiting us in the House. She's one of our very few Inuvialuktun language experts in the Northwest Territories. There's very few of them left, so I want to take this opportunity to recognize Beverly. Her hometown is Sachs Harbour, Northwest Territories, and she now lives with her husband Lawrence at their cabin at Hans Bay on the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway. So welcome, Beverly.

MR. SPEAKER: Welcome to your House, and thank you very much for allowing us to represent the people of the Northwest Territories.

Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 205-20(1):
CLIMATE CHANGE

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to extend birthday greetings out to a special lady who is 85 years young today. Colleagues, I'd like to wish my aunty

Mary Effie Snowshoe who is celebrating her birthday today. She's from Teet'lit Zheh.

Mr. Speaker, we have all seen the effects of climate change in the North and, specifically, in our communities. The erosions of the shorelines, wildfires and drought, just to name a few. What is the government doing to address the seriousness of climate change within the Northwest Territories and the impacts on the Indigenous peoples of this land? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for the question. I think as we have all seen over the last couple of years specifically, climate change has certainly played a large role in things all across the territory between floods and wildfire and, you know, a lot of challenges have been faced. The GNWT specifically is taking action with partners all across the territory in the North to mitigate and adapt to climate change. We invest significant resources to address climate change, including implementing actions identified in our climate change and energy action plans. ECC is also the lead on climate change and is using a coordinated interdepartmental approach with priorities that include transitioning to a lower carbon economy and privy climate knowledge in the North and building resilience while adapting to the impacts of climate change. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Education is very important in teaching our residents about climate change. It is especially important to engage with our young, with your youth, because they are the ones who inherited this human-caused disaster. What is this government doing to educate our young people on how to adapt to climate change? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, ECC will continue to work with the GNWT climate change outreach plan to increase climate change awareness and increase capacity toward climate change all across the NWT. And I don't want to speak for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, but ECC would certainly be interested in pursuing conversations around ensuring that we are addressing the issue of climate change and how it relates to youth. So I will commit to having that conversation with the Minister at the appropriate time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How is the government using traditional knowledge from the Indigenous peoples to adapt and combat climate change? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for the question. I think ECC certainly has taken the approach that incorporating traditional knowledge is a really important area of how we do our day-to-day work in all areas throughout the department and certainly is a big component in how we approach climate change, ensuring that we are hearing all of the voices from all of the communities and affected people across the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the department have a website where the residents can go to get information on funding to assist in education or alternative of any of these solutions? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't have the specifics of that request with me, but I commit to providing that information to the Member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 206-20(1):
MEDICAL TRAVEL

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in my Member's statement, I spoke about the issues we're having with escorts for elders travelling to Yellowknife or Inuvik or Edmonton. I'd like to ask my colleague, the Minister of Health and Social Services, what the department's doing to look at dealing with the issue of the onerous bureaucracy that these elders have to go through to get an escort to escort them out? Thank you.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, within our medical travel policy, it, you know -- and I'm not sure if I mentioned it in this House before -- but there are many streams in our medical travel policy. There are the NIHB clients who fall under the NIHB rules. There are the Metis benefits. There are extended health client benefits clients that

all fall -- those ones fall under the GNWT medical travel policy.

When it comes to regards to escorts, Mr. Speaker, there are certain criteria in the escort policy that must be -- you know, that the person -- whoever's travelling, if it is an elder, as the Member has mentioned in the statement, that can't speak English, then that should be put in as a request as there is a language barrier and that would be -- fall under our policy. But if it is put in as an elder and because of their age, that doesn't meet our criteria. If it's an Indigenous person, it doesn't meet NHIB's criteria. Right now, there's an actual program -- I think it's a pilot program that's being funded by ISC, Indigenous Services Canada, with Inuvialuit. So Inuvialuit members can go through their office and request for -- if they are denied through NHIB criteria, they can apply through them to have compassion escorts or, you know, and so. But that is directly a bilateral between that group. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I understand there's a policy for this. What I'm saying is that if you have an elder, is there not a way -- and I get that, you know, there is the different plans out there. But, again, you have an elder who whether they're going down to have a hangnail removed, it doesn't matter. If there's an elder and they don't speak English, they need to be navigated, they need help navigating even to get to their appointments, is there not something we can do to kind of streamline that so, again, that paperwork is not being done. If there's not anybody in -- and medical travel is medical travel, and I'm sure the Minister has heard many, many questions on medical travel. Is there not something we could do to streamline that so when you get to the situation of you have an elder in the community, it's just automatic there's an escort in there.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if there are -- you know, I guess, again, if it's an elder, you know -- I hear the Member. I know of many stories, you know, and I'm not going to deny that this is something that we are aware of. We know this is a gap in our policy, and that is why the medical travel policy is its own target in our -- you know, in the business plans. And so this is one of the areas that I really want to focus on. I want to use some of the information I will learn probably from the bilateral with Inuvialuit, and also to be able to hear from -- we have the Indigenous patient advocates who are constantly hearing this. They're taking the data. We know that this is an issue. And I'm not going to say in this House that it's not a gap, but it is, and I recognize it,

and I am working towards trying to figure out ways to deal with this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm very happy to hear that. And I know the Minister realizes that this is not -- this is not a new concern, something that's been just brought to the forefront.

Can the Minister elaborate a little more, I guess, on medical travel and the plan? Is medical travel in its entirety undergoing a review, or are we just looking at kind of the escort side. Maybe the Minister could speak to that. Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, I will say that I want the entire -- how we move patients in the Northwest Territories is what the focus I want to look at. How we move them, who's moving, what are the things that we cannot have to move people for. Is there ways that we can put things into communities that it's going to be less expensive in the long run. It's more of a fulsome review of how we move people for medical in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. RODGERS: Thank you. And that is, indeed, excellent news, and I'm sure it's excellent news for those that have been struggling with our medical travel system for the past several years. Just, again, a final question. I mean, likely it's a redundant question given how this government has now been approaching what we do, but she will be engaging and consulting with all Indigenous governments on this plan, I assume? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes, thank you. Medical travel is, I think, probably one of the standing agenda items with Indigenous governments. Every Indigenous government that we speak to will raise this issue. I am committed to continuing to work with Indigenous governments and hearing what their concerns are with how we move patients.

They've also stressed the issues from the Council of Leaders to Indigenous Service Canada, how we move patients. So it's not just the government policy part. It's the work that we're doing on the NIHB medical travel policy with -- you know, in collaboration with Indigenous governments. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 207-20(1):
MIDWIFERY

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the Minister of health, more so specifically to the challenges obstetrics has had over the years and the midwives. So, Mr. Speaker, my question specifically goes directly to the issue of what evidence-based evaluation's been used to re-profile the midwifery money to other purposes? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. A little bit on the line there but I'm going to go to the Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: The work that's being done in the obstetrics unit is guided by, you know, the staff feedback that was done. So I can speak to that.

As for the midwifery area that -- you know, midwifery, the positions that -- in Yellowknife that have been there -- you know, I think that is a separate discussion. The obstetrics stuff that's been going on and trying to maintain our basic service and trying to fill that gap on the obstetric, there has been work. There has been -- like I said in this House before, the staffing complement has changed, and that was at the recommendation of the staff -- the previous staff that had put forward. And so we are trying to accommodate that and provide training on that unit so that way we can build up the capacity there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, tying it back to the obstetrics issue, again we're talking about children in the context of birthing and supporting. How do we meet these needs through locum nurses and how does -- through the evidence-based process, how is it defined as cheaper or smarter? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: I'm not sure how I answer quite that -- cheaper and smarter, providing health care services in the Northwest Territories to, you know, birthing people that are waiting to have babies is always going to be cheaper. Having staff that we can, you know -- using locums, bringing locums in, they -- you know, that's been one of the areas that we -- you know, even with locums, that is -- we try to hire full-time first and then if we can't hire full-time, then we go to terms, which locums are more for physicians. That's the term they use for physicians. We use terms, term contracts with nurses, which are fully -- they fully fall under the line of the collective agreement when we hire them. They're the same pay, the same benefits, but they provide

the service. This is an expertise area that needs extra training. And we need specialized nurses that can work in this area so that women can have safe births. We also have accreditation which also looks at how our policies in that unit are safe practice. And so those are done in Stanton and in Inuvik to make sure that those birthing services are safe for the Northwest Territories' residents. And the less risk that we have, the safer, the less cost it is. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, the Minister says they've tried to hire the positions, but I can assure you the midwife advertisements for hiring has gone silent for some time. So, Mr. Speaker, back to the evidence-based question, what evidence-based analysis has proven this -- proven these solutions that the Minister has claimed to make are proven as facts? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, evidence-based or not, we need a basic delivery service. We need birthing services. We need a birthing service that is going to be staffed. That's what we're working towards. And that is what we are focused on in getting a birthing service in Yellowknife that we can -- you know, stabilize. Adding -- you know, expanding midwifery is an extra, like I said, in Yellowknife. It's not an extra in Fort Smith, and it's not an extra in Hay River. And, you know, it expanded from Fort Smith to Hay River. It even expanded in Fort Smith, the more midwifery. And so right now, we're having a hard time even keeping those positions filled, so we need to focus where there's no birthing services. And that's what I'm doing, and that's what I'm committed to doing. 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. When the Minister responds to saying evidence-based or not, does that draw the question that the department doesn't use evidence to make these decisions, or do they just make the decisions off the side of the table? Could the Minister clarify are they using facts or fiction to come up with these results? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member -- I believe the Member was questioning whether or not the Minister was using fact or fiction, essentially telling mistruths.

But I may have misheard the Member and if I did, I apologize. But from this side, it sounded like the Member had crossed that line. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Can we stop the clock for a second, please.

To the Member, Yellowknife Centre, can you please clarify, please.

MR. HAWKINS: Actually, you know, it's fine. I'm comfortable with taking the context of fiction away. I don't feel like I want to tie Assembly time up so I withdraw the point of fiction, and basically, I'm back to the point -- I'll withdraw it, but I'll say are they using facts or creativity to make these decisions? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Member, thank you. Member, can you please clarify what you just -- what are you trying to achieve, please. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Are they using facts to come up with these decisions? Thank you.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Yes. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 208-20(1): OBSTETRICS

MS. REID: Wow, okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are also for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Could the Minister please confirm if the majority of need for agency nurses is in obstetrics? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, we only have two obstetric units in the Northwest Territories. One is at Stanton, one is in Inuvik, and that is currently where they are. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that clarity.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister confirm -- although I did hear her say a little bit about this in an earlier answer, so I'll reframe my question on the fly. Can the Minister confirm how local nurses are being able to be -- or will be able to be trained in labour and delivery. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for this question. Currently, yes, nurses can train in the Northwest Territories to be obstetric nurses. How they do that, you know, there's multiple different ways. Back in the day when I trained, it was more of a mentorship, and you take certifications. Now it's a little bit more technical. So they do have to have hours. They do have to have a mentor. Currently, within our OBS, there are nurses receiving training and becoming fully competent in this specialized area. And as a result of this training, we have increased our capacity. And although the OBS unit still requires agency support to offset some of these vacancies, they're also allowing training of labour and delivery nurses in the need -- in this unit. So I just want to make sure that the Member knows that over the time that these nurses have been training as well is that the less and less we're becoming reliant on them in this unit. Thank you.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister. That's really great to hear. And to, you know, echo my colleague from Monfwi's statement earlier today, it's really good to hear that this Minister's supporting things over time and getting us there, and I hope she can get us there as quickly as possible. So to that end, is the Minister's department willing to invest further in training local NWT health care workers to increase their skill sets? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can confirm we have things in place already, and I think the more and more we are starting to utilizing them to fill and train specialized nursing, we have a specialized nursing training program. We have the Targeted Academic Support Program. We have professional development initiative funding, which can all be accessed by current staff who wish to gain their certification to work in more specialized areas. And as mentioned, any RN who is interested to being trained in a specialty area can submit their request in a few different ways by applying to the specialized nursing training program or can reach out to their supervisor. And I am hopeful that we can repeat our successes in other areas that we have been able to eliminate agency nurses in the main hospital. And over the past year, through interventions like specialized nursing transition programs, which as a combination of recruitment efforts, has allowed us to eliminate agency nurses in our operating room, in the medicine units, and effectively reducing overall agency nurses by half of what it was at this time last year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 209-20(1):
SUICIDE PREVENTION SERVICES

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following up on my Member's statement on the drug addictions here, my question here is to the Minister of Health and Social Services. Can the Minister explain in short the types of funding available for addictions recovery. Mahsi.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker -- and I thank the Member for raising this concern. You know, the more and more we talk about this, the more and more it becomes normalized, and we're able to work together to try and find solutions.

The Department of Health and Social Services, two programs currently available. We have the community suicide prevention fund and the community wellness and addiction recovery fund, which is a fund that we actually, from recommendations last government, was asked to be put together and have less -- it's more flexible for Indigenous governments to access.

The community suicide prevention fund supports the delivery of culturally safe programs focusing on prevention of suicide and increasing community wellness, reducing stigma, and the development of implementation of suicide prevention strategy.

Within the community wellness and addiction recovery fund, prioritizes Indigenous governments and supports to the delivery of community-based mental wellness and addiction recovery programs that meet the unique needs of the respective communities. And as currently right now, we are currently accepting applications for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. And so I encourage, like, Members of this House to reach out to their Indigenous governments and Indigenous NGOs to access these dollars. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank the Minister for making those funds known and available to support the problems we have. It's very -- still disturbs me today on the outcomes that I've seen on my last session in the Sahtu.

My next question is on the O and M side of operations and designing your efforts to bring resolution to the problem is, to me, in various parts. My next is there O and M funding to

support the operations of an on-the-land treatment centre? Mahsi.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Mr. Speaker, the funding through the community wellness and addiction recovery fund is to support Indigenous governments to deliver community-based mental health and addiction recovery programs unique to their needs, and Indigenous governments may absolutely choose to use their funding for O and M and on-the-land programs. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. McNEELY: Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks for the response to the Minister. Now let's move on to another little issue of supports here, employees, staffing.

Can the Minister elaborate or respond on support availability and into a secondment of counselling positions to assist the Sahtu Secretariat in designing and delivering this recovery program to address the drug and addictions issues they're facing? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, right now I can't commit to a secondment but what I'm willing to do is work collaboratively with SSI and other Indigenous governments to implement programs to support mental wellness. I'm also committed to supporting Indigenous governments and communities advancing these wellness solutions that are grounded in cultural communities and their perspectives. I welcome the opportunity to learn more about the vision. And I know that the Member has got some work that they'll be doing next week in their region, and I look forward to hearing and seeing what's coming out of that. But I do want to say that this money under the community wellness addiction recovery fund, I said -- as I said, it was very flexible and so the -- if the SSI decided that they wanted to hire a counsellor with that money or they wanted to use it for on the land or they wanted to use it -- it's flexible for them to design their own way that they want it, and then the regional governments, and if they choose to, you know, there's even opportunities to go into multi-year funding agreements if they have a plan. But just to continue to work with our department, if you need more information. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 210-20(1):
ACCESSIBILITY

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. It's quite simple. Will the Minister of Infrastructure bring forward accessibility legislation for the NWT during the life of the 20th Assembly?

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one of the first things I asked the department to look at was building a building standards framework for the Northwest Territories. And that can certainly include an accessibility provision within it. That work's only just getting underway, obviously depending upon the passing of the budget, to determine what kind of ability our departments all have to conduct that work, but hopefully we will be in a position to achieve what's in our business plan which is a buildings standards framework and one that includes accessibility within its provisions. Thank you.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And just to get a bit of clarification, I believe the Minister said building standards framework. Is this going to be a Building Act, or are we talking about something different? Because I know the city of Yellowknife has been asking for a Building Act with accessibility standards built into it, so can the Minister provide some clarity on that. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my hope that it is a Building Act. Again, at this point, it's in our business plan. It's part of the work that would happen with the department, subject to where we land in terms of our budgets here. But if we are in a position, that is my intention, is that we'll move forward. We have a working group formed now and hoping to get started the process of developing what would go into a Building Act for the Northwest Territories, including what kind of accessibility legislation it would include. That would be what comes in the next fiscal year, or over the course of the next fiscal year, leading ultimately up to the process that builds towards that Act. Thank you.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the Minister able to give the Assembly a timeline for this? When can the Assembly expect a legislative proposal to come forward within reasonable time that the Assembly would be able to establish this new legislation within our -- the term of the 20th? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't have my business plans open in front of me right now. I think for the next fiscal year is the part that I

have in mind and the first step already having been achieved is a working group. The next step is the work plan to scope out what should or potentially should be included in a building standards or a Building Act. And that, really, would be the first set of deliverables. Once we know the scope of what would be included, for example, including accessibility, that can determine the size and scope and timeline required for a full Act. I would certainly hope that we could get to the point of an LP soon thereafter, whether it would get all the way to being passed this Assembly or not, again, will depend on the scope and size of the Act. But it was certainly, as I said, one of the first asks I made when I had the opportunity to take on this portfolio. Thank you.

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

Oral questions. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

QUESTION 211-20(1):
RCMP CANINE SERVICES IN THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I spoke about the issue about drugs throughout the Northwest Territories as coming through the borders. Mr. Speaker, my question would be to the Minister of Justice. Can the Minister of Justice shed light on why the South Slave no longer has a dedicated K-9 unit and when that service was lost? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Minister of Justice.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The K-9 unit was established in Hay River after the death, the murder, of Constable Chris Worden. And it was stationed there until 2018. That was the time when the RCMP undertook a review of the situation, and they determined that it was not as effective to have the police dog in Hay River. It's a territorial asset. And so if there was an incident in the Sahtu, let's say, they would have to fly to Hay River, get the dog, and then head up. There's a number of other situations as well. I can leave it at that I guess, because things -- new things have come to light. But there's other issues like the inability of the RCMP to now just do, you know, quote unquote, random searches, you might not have the legal grounds to search someone. But, you know, you used to be able to go and sniff the dog around and see if got an indication if there was any contraband, any drugs, but you can no longer do things like that. So the value of having the dog in Hay River, according to the RCMP's

analysis, wasn't there relative to having it in Yellowknife where it was easier to deploy to other places in the territory. Thank you.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How is our only current K-9 unit based in Yellowknife able to serve the needs of the entire Northwest Territories? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I can assure the Member that, you know, I'm the Minister of Justice and I'm from Hay River, so these are not questions that I have not asked before. I've had conversations with my colleagues and with the commanding officer about this because I -- you know, I have that same sense as anyone else. Like, who doesn't want a police dog in their community, especially when you're feeling the effects of drugs. So the -- having the K-9 based in Yellowknife allows it to be quickly -- more quickly deployed to locations where it needs, whether that is in the South Slave or elsewhere, and it is often sent down to the South Slave. It also allows for enhanced -- or I guess easier training. There are requirements in place where the handlers and the dogs need training together at the same time. And so if the dog was outside of Yellowknife, it would have to fly into Yellowknife along with the handler, do the training, and fly back. So you'd be looking at three, four days out of the community every single week. So there are circumstances like that as well. There's also been issues with, I think, burnout with the RCMP who just have the one handler who is doing the majority of the work, the one's based in Yellowknife. So, you know, there's a multitude of issues here. And I'll say, if I had an unlimited budget, I'd have two dogs and two handlers in Hay River as well, but that's not the situation we're in. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Minister for responding. Knowing what we know now about the drug problems in the Northwest Territories that impacts our homes and our communities, will the Minister take a look at reviewing this whole K-9 unit needed for Hay River and commit to funding that if possible. It's urgently needed here now in the Northwest Territories with the crisis we have and the drug problems. Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have discussed this with the RCMP. They are not making that request for an additional K-9 unit so it's hard for me to force it on them if they're not asking for it. That being said, the landscape has changed. The ability for the dogs to go and do random searches of people essentially is not there anymore. And so we need to look at what other tools we can utilize that are going to be more effective given the

new legal environment that we're living in. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Justice. Final supplementary. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you. I hear what the Minister is saying and, again, you know, we do have problems that are hitting home, and I'm deeply concerned about it as a Member. Is there -- so if we can fund it and we don't have the money, how can we address this issue to better monitor the drug problems as coming through the borders in the South Slave region here into the Northwest Territories; what can we do different? And can we maybe have a meeting with the RCMP and have them to look at this issue again and see if we could look at funding this again. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is -- the commanding officer -- the former commanding officer is now gone but we have an acting commanding officer in that role, and I don't believe that the standing committee has met with that new commanding officer. So I recommend that they reach out and they request a meeting. I think that would be valuable to have these discussions, you know, with the people who would actually be, you know, working with the dogs. But to the Member's question, what can we do to disrupt the drug trade? Mr. Speaker, we're trying. The RCMP have a new strategy. I spoke about it yesterday. We've seen a significant, significant increase in the amount of drugs seized, the amount of charges. We're looking at new legislation. So we are taking steps to address this because, as I've said many times, I recognize the severity of the issue. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Justice. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife North.

QUESTION 212-20(1):
OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S LAWYER

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Justice. Can the Minister speak to what value the Office of the Children's Lawyer has added since its establishment in 2011, including the value of the support it has offered to the roster of lawyers who take on cases advocating for children? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And the children's lawyer provided great value, of course. That position is now vacant. But the

person who was in there did a lot of work and it's very appreciated, those efforts. The children's lawyer would meet regularly with the panel of children's lawyers. So there's the Office of the Children's Lawyer, and they essentially oversee a panel of lawyers in various places in the territory, I believe one is also in Edmonton, and they assign cases to those panel lawyers. They would also provide some professional development opportunities, do research, keep up to date on what's happening in the world of children's law. They updated the -- they were responsible for updating the policy manual for the office. They were responsible -- or they oversaw the migration of all the data collected by the office into the new legal aid information data base. So they performed a number of different roles. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I understand that the manual for the Office of the Children's Lawyer has been completed. But can the Minister explain how often that manual is supposed to continue to be updated and reviewed and who would be best suited to complete that work? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The manual needs to be updated as new -- there's new developments in best practices and case law and things like that. And so in the future, it's possible that the -- those roles will be done by other members of the -- other lawyers in the Legal Aid Commission. We do have a number of lawyers who specialize in family law who deal with children's law. There's opportunities for those staff to have professional development opportunities to learn more about children's law. I'm sure they get notifications in their inbox when there are significant cases that impact the world of children's law. So there is capacity among the other lawyers to undertake that work when needed. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the agenda for this government includes amending the Child and Family Services Act to address the 19th Assembly's Standing Committee on Social Development's recommendations and to align the Act with the federal Act respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Metis children and youth. So how does the Minister propose to gain specialized advice about the legal rights of children as part of its review of the Child and Family Services Act, or propose changes to related acts, such as the Children's Law Act or the Family Law Act. So how does the Minister propose to gain advice on -- as we review the Acts during this Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As with any initiative, I expect that the relevant department will undertake a thorough review and reach out to experts as needed. I just want to reassure everyone that the Northwest Territories has no shortage of lawyers. I think we have four times the number of lawyers per capita compared to the rest of Canada. There's plenty of legal advice out there for the taking. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question just would be does the Minister know how many lawyers we have that specifically specialize in children's -- or law -- I don't know if children's law is a thing, but law that specifically pertains to the legal rights of children? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe there are seven panel lawyers who are regularly assigned files by the children's lawyer. So that's just within the territory and those are just the panel lawyers. And I'm not sure how many other lawyers in the territory also have expertise in that area. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Justice. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 213-20(1):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES ASSET SECURITY PACKAGE

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are directed to the Minister of Infrastructure, and it's about security. What -- does the Department of Infrastructure have any policies built around security of buildings for staff and clients? Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Department of Infrastructure does have some buildings where we are the owner, other buildings where we are a lessee. And in some cases, we would support other departments. So I'm not sure if the Member's referring to which of those types of situations. We certainly do have a lot of situations where we have had recently retained security firms to perhaps support particular buildings that are within our purview. And as far as policies, I can certainly get back to the Member. If there's a specific policy, there would have been an procurement process that went out in order to identify having security staff

when that is deemed appropriate or necessary. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll accept the Minister's offer of that. That said, the next question is do we have any policies that restrict the use of cameras intended for security that do not record sound on any of our assets as a territorial government? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have to get back to the Member as to whether there is a policy on cameras that restrict sound, if I understand that correctly. I suspect there probably is not such a specific policy, Mr. Speaker, and so if there's a particular issue that the Member's trying to get at here, I'd be happy to hear it. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: The reason I say sound is because if I understand it correctly, although I'm not a lawyer, but you're not allowed to record unsuspecting peoples' conversations, etcetera. So that's why I'm saying without the sound piece, just to be -- so I go back to the question, is the Minister aware of any video cameras providing security on any NWT assets? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If it's on any NWT asset, that is a fairly large number of assets, Mr. Speaker, and so I will want to ensure that I am providing an accurate response. I'll have to take that away and see if there are cameras on any asset across the portfolio of the Northwest Territories government. Thank you.

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

MR. HAWKINS: I'm pleased to narrow it down, Mr. Speaker. I'm more referring to office buildings. I'm sure airports have video cameras, etcetera. I'm more referring to office buildings and that similar type of nature where we have employees and day-to-day clients. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that there are cameras that are in use for security purposes. Exactly, again, across the entire portfolio of assets and nature of each one, I'll want to just confirm so that we're always being accurate. And I do want to assure the Member there is work in place right now to ensure there's a policy for the use of any cameras, whether on current or future assets as it may be required. And we'll be happy to take the Member's suggestions to ensure that we have abiding by whatever rules or laws appropriate as they pertain to those cameras. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 214-20(1):
MEDICAL TRAVEL POLICY

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was feeling ignored. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister of Health and Social Services about medical travel policy. So I spoke of a terrible circumstance that happened to a constituent of mine when they were sent to Edmonton under emergent circumstances and were incapacitated and very much on death's door. And thankfully they've now recovered. Their spouse was denied on their claim to go down and provide care and support. So I'd like to know why do we have -- why is it okay for a spouse to travel on a scheduled trip but not during a medical emergency when end of life decisions may be required? Thank you.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, generally, clients who are in the care of medical escorts are not provided with -- or sorry, with medical escorts are not provided with nonmedical escorts. So that would be in the instances if somebody is medevaced. Air ambulance and emergency services are excluded under the NWT medical travel Policy. But the department is aware that -- and does acknowledge that there is an emergency service policy that could include escort criteria. Again, as I've just obtained this department and I know we're going to go through a fulsome review of our medical travel and how we move people around, you know, we know that this is another gap in the area; however, when we are moving patients -- like, the escort policy, the nonmedical escort policy, does not pertain to when someone is medevaced unless that person is a minor and falls under the criteria that it is -- although there is exceptional circumstances under our medical travel policy that go to the department for an exception request. But the NIHB does -- this is the quirk that I found out, and so it causes an imbalance and inequity in how services are provided. NIHB beneficiaries may receive a nonmedical escort supported when this kind of situation happens, but those each are approved through the northern region office right through directly through NIHB. So that's separate from the Northwest Territories medical travel policy. And I know when we say medical travel policy, everybody thinks that's just one area. But even my 15 years, 18 years, even as an NIHB navigator, becoming the Minister and trying to

get the fulsome picture of this has been piece by piece and so this was a new thing that I kind of realized today. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this is a mandate item as well, to fix this problem, but, I mean, we have -- when we hear stories of people who are being asked to zoom in to their loved one who is intubated at a hospital and make decisions for them because that's the option instead of flying them down, I don't know how that's compassionate. So will the Minister specifically review this set of circumstances where there are people who cannot advocate for themselves, who are in critical condition and require a spouse or someone who can speak with power of attorney or on their behalf to make those decisions, will she review the policy to make sure those people are covered by medical travel? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can review it, but we do have the exception policy. So the role of the health care practitioner is to make the assessment, provide the recommendation for an escort. That recommendation must be explicit to the reason for a request. A lot of times the request is care and compassion, and I get that -- you know, if I could give everybody a care and compassion escort, you know, I would not be liked by my colleagues very much. You know, because it's going to be -- like, the amount of people that are travelling in the Northwest Territories -- I think we provided a report, and I can find that report and send it off to Members. But I think we move about 40 to almost 50,000 people a year in medical travel and so if every one of those we were to give an escort to, you know, it starts to -- it adds up. And so -- but it's also the role of the physician who is making the recommendation to be specific on the needs of what that person is doing. Like the Member said, and I won't speak to individual cases, but they have to be very specific. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm not talking about every case, certainly not every -- all 50,000 people we move. We're talking about a narrow set of circumstances. When people are in critical care conditions, when they are incapacitated or sedated, they're not able to make decisions for themselves, they may be at end of life, can the Minister agree to review the policy around those individuals who require nonmedical escorts to be their advocates when they're in that situation; can she commit to that? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have committed to it in the business plan. Like I said, it is in the bigger

picture. I understand the Member wants this specific area but then the other Member wants a specific area, and then if I go down the list and throughout the next four years, every Member's going to have their specific instance. So we need to make sure that we have all -- compiled all those instances and come out with a policy that's fair and equitable for the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, the story I told, that's \$6,000 out-of-pocket for a retired couple. I have another constituent that's \$7,000 out-of-pocket. People work paycheque to paycheque in the Northwest Territories. They can't afford these costs. Will the Minister take action and commit to solving this problem? There's a whole bunch of problems but this is a very specific one affecting a small amount of people in a very significant way; will she solve this problem? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to -- I have answered that but what I'm going to say, it is not a specific instance. I have -- since Minister, five months, I have received numerous and numerous and thousands and thousands of dollars that people have spent on, you know -- like, myself, if I had to fly out if my child was sick or my mother-in-law was sick or my -- you know, my family member was sick and I had to jump on a plane and go and be with them, you know, I would be out-of-pocket as well. But I do get these BFs constantly and so this -- like I said, I am looking at it. I know that there is an area that there is a gap, but it will be part of the overall review. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

QUESTION 215-20(1):
USE OF AGENCY NURSES

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, I have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Different topic.

Mr. Speaker, how many agency nurse contracts have been utilized since 2021? Thank you.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't have that level of detail but I know that the Member did have a written question. I don't know if that -- I can't recall if that information was in there, but I can

get back to the Member if we can compile that data. Thanks.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have -- in that question the Minister responded to, I have the dollar amount spent but not the actual individuals. So can the -- to be clear, how many times have individual agency nurses been brought in to Northwest Territories health care facilities? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, since 2020, I think that is when we started using agency nurses, I don't have the number of the contracts and that's -- the level of detail that is. What we are doing is we're using nurses where they're not going to shut down services. And, you know, I hear that the Member -- this is something that, you know, he's raised many times in this House but then when you go out to the small communities and they're shut down and the services are -- we can't find a nurse, you know, those are the communities that, you know, may have to utilize a nurse. And so we can continue to talk about how many and how many of this, but at the end of the day, the care that these -- the residents are getting, having a nurse in the community -- you know, sometimes we have to wait, you know, does this nurse know the community? Well, the nurse knows their job. So, you know, when we sit here and we go back and forth about these numbers, when right now we have five. We have five nurses -- agency nurses keeping obstetrics open in the Northwest Territories. And so we can continue to have these discussions on the floor but I am not going to jeopardize this service in this community. And if it was in a health centre, then we'd be medevacing everybody out of that health centre to Yellowknife or to Inuvik or to Fort -- you know, this is -- that's the option. So I'll leave it at that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Colleagues, if you're getting really into detail, maybe wish to put it as a written question, so. Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Minister could tell me there are five right now so I thought she'd be able to look back with that recollection.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to keep asking questions about agency nurses as long as nurses who live and work here are upset about it and have a right to raise these concerns with their MLAs.

Mr. Speaker, how many times have agency nurses been used in small community health centres? Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the reason I ask that is we're here -- they're only used for obstetrics, they're only used for these, like, hard to find units, we don't want them to shut down. But the concern is that we're going to lose health centres in small communities. So is the Minister aware of any circumstances right now where a small community health centre is going to be staffed with agency nurses?

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Tlicho Service Agency staffs theirs when -- when they're on the verge of having no nursing and I know that, from my understanding -- and this is why I know that there's five, is because everybody time I come to the House I always ask my department, so how many agency nurses we have? Because I know this is going to be a question here. And so -- but I do know that, you know, the Tlicho Service Agency does utilize them to keep their health centres open and they have, you know, vacancies over the summer and so they may have to utilize those if they cannot find nurses to fill those vacancies. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 216-20(1):
GUARDIANS OF THE LAND PROGRAM

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For something completely different, we'll -- like the Maytag repair man, we'll go to questions to the Minister of ECC I guess. He doesn't get a lot of questions. We'll give him a chance today.

So, Mr. Speaker, my question for him today is about the Guardians of the Land. Could he describe what the program is, where it is, and how much it's being supported in the Northwest Territories when he describes what it is. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member. That was kind of three questions. I will turn to the Minister of ECC.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for the questions. The Guardian program is a collaborative program that is -- I can't speak specifically to the locations at this time, but I would certainly be happy to provide that

information to the Member. The Guardian program supports collaborative efforts between the Department of ECC and local Indigenous organizations and governments to work together in the monitoring of activities and wildlife on the landscape. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister said he would provide the locations. I'll accept that offer.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister speak to the specific mandate the territorial government has to support the Guardians throughout the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Guardian program is part of Our Lands Our Future document that is the guiding document that identifies protected areas within the NWT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not specific in the context of this current budget, although that sort of is the answer, but I'm not questioning the current budget, but what is the program funded with? Where do we get our funding and how much do we fund on this?

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have that specifically open in my business plan document at the time, but I would be more than willing to provide the Member with a briefing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm curious if the Minister can answer the question with respect to how does a community or region access this opportunity to create a Guardian program? Is there an application, is it an interest of community, is it an interest of a region, etcetera? So can the Minister explain what process to establish them and support them? Thank you.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Guardian programs are associated with protected areas within Northwest Territories, and those programs are collaboratively engaged with local Indigenous governments. I don't currently have the specifics of how a community would go about applying for that, but I'd be more than happy to provide that information to the Member. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of ECC. Colleagues, our time is up for oral questions. Oral questions. Written questions. Returns to

written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of committees on the review of bills.

Colleagues, we would like to have a brief break as the time is been over two hours and our translators need to stretch their legs and get a little refreshment. So we'll have a brief adjournment.

---SHORT RECESS

MR. SPEAKER: Reports of standing and special committees. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

Reports of Standing and Special Committees

COMMITTEE REPORT 1-20(1): STANDING COMMITTEE ON ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT REPORT ON THE 2024-2025 MAIN ESTIMATES, ADOPTED

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight is pleased to provide its report on the 2024-2025 Main Estimates.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight, the committee of course, of the 20th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories is charged with the responsibility of providing oversight over the business and budget operations of the Government of the Northwest Territories.

The purpose of this report, Mr. Speaker, is twofold:

1. To provide publicly the position of the committee in their review of the proposed 2024-2025 Main Estimates tabled by the Government of the Northwest Territories on May 24th, 2024; and, Mr. Speaker,
2. To identify key policy initiatives and goals that the Government should look to advance through their business plans.

The mandate of the committee, which is comprised of all 11 Regular Members, is to provide oversight and accountability into government budgets and operations. We are tasked to lead negotiations of the proposed main estimates to ensure that outcomes can be achieved and accountability is maximized.

Mr. Speaker, the committee wishes to note that this is the first time that a report on main estimates has been brought into the House.

The intent of this report is to draw public attention to what has historically occurred behind closed doors and for the public to better understand how a finalized operations budget occurs through the consensus system.

Regular Members form the majority of the House and it is our role to hold the government to account and ensure that the budget and policy direction of the government are reflective of our shared priorities. Providing the Committees position on the Governments budget and policy direction is intended to bring forward conversations that regularly occur through in-camera discussions between Executive Council and Regular Members. Mr. Speaker, the committee will present our positions according to the agreed upon priorities of the 20th Assembly. It is through this new process that additional transparency and accountability can be brought forward for all Members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, housing remains a top priority of the 20th Assembly. The committee was disappointed to see that the 2024-2025 Main Estimates reflected a decrease in total operations funding for Housing Northwest Territories by \$13 million. This decrease does not accurately reflect how this Assembly has chosen its priorities. Mr. Speaker, housing is a key concern for all regions and communities throughout the Northwest Territories. Although an operations budget is before the committee, we will be seeking a commitment to provide \$200 million in capital funding for Housing Northwest Territories over the life of the 20th Assembly.

The committee is also seeking a commitment for Housing Northwest Territories and Health and Social Services to provide budgeted initiatives that enhance assisted living options for people with disabilities and supportive living options for vulnerable populations. Only by supporting non-profit organizations and Indigenous governments in the development of housing options for these vulnerable residents can we see positive changes. Another gap on the housing spectrum could be addressed by cooperative housing Initiatives. The committee is asking that the government provide resident-led efforts to protect homes and neighbourhoods by creating incentives and for investment in housing cooperatives.

Mr. Speaker, ultimately the committee believes there is a need to support our municipalities by transferring land to be used for additional opportunities for housing. Too many of our municipalities, Mr. Speaker, face barriers in meeting the current legislated requirements that would allow lands to be transferred to their authority. The committee is seeking a

commitment for the development of a legislative proposal from the Department of Environment and Climate Change that streamlines the current challenges posed to municipalities in their abilities to access lands, including the current requirements that a community must develop controls to manage the land, create a community plan, and that parcels must be surveyed prior to transfer. The current requirements far exceed the capacity of municipalities to access land within their boundaries and change is needed.

Mr. Speaker, the committee acknowledges the need to build capacity amongst all residents of the Northwest Territories to support a strong economic foundation. This begins with a call for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to explicitly include an action in their business plan to improve outcomes in basic literacy and numeracy for JK to 12 Students. The importance of supporting the Aurora College transformation captures the bookend of this need as the committee has a strong desire to see investment into the transformation to ensure it can be successful in our effort to build our labour market capacity.

Mr. Speaker, the committee is also concerned with the proposed reductions of \$1.1 million to the Small Community Employment Program. The Small Community Employment Program is a key program that creates employment within our communities so that they can support economic activity in a sustainable manner. This program should be restored to its previous funding level and include new parameters that ensure all funding is provided to small communities as opposed to regional centers.

Mr. Speaker, the same sentiment can be made for the Community Access Program. The committee feels that this program, which provides financial contributions towards the construction or maintenance of access roads, trails, docks and wharfs, should be reinstated to \$1.5 million. Although there may be implementation challenges with the current scope of the program, this funding is key to support community initiatives such as ice roads. Moreover, this funding should be expanded towards feasibility studies that enable communities to determine how they approach infrastructure needs.

Mr. Speaker, the committee remains committed to reducing our reliance on carbon intensive fuels. We are calling for the publication of a plan that outlines how the utility regulator, the three electrical utilities, the territorial government, and interested Indigenous governments, will work together to develop a short, medium, and long-term roadmap. This should include appropriate planning, regulatory, and policy

tools to enable the transformation of the Northwest Territories electrical system over the coming decades in alignment with climate goals and building greater energy independence in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, the committee acknowledges that there is a need for a regulatory streamlining. Calling for the 2020 Environmental Audit to be prioritized, funded, and implemented will support our goal in providing a strong regulatory regime that gives our resources sector the certainty that they require.

Mr. Speaker, the committee acknowledges that improving the accessibility and quality of health care is a multifaceted and complex issue. The committee also acknowledges that frontline health care staff are key to improving the working conditions and culture of our health care system. We are fortunate to have so many hard working and dedicated staff that can support innovative solutions for our health care system. Strategically advancing the territorial health care workforce plan and establishing an Office of Practitioner Experience are all tangible actions that can support our current system. Mr. Speaker, the committee is calling on the Department of Health and Social Services to look internally through job evaluation and labour market incentives to create a more attractive health care workplace. These actions will help support the retention and recruitment of health care professionals.

Mr. Speaker, reducing critical funding for innovative programs such as the midwifery expansion program or including income testing for extended health benefits is not the way to improve access to health care. The committee is strongly advocating to reinstate the \$990,000 for the midwifery program and the creation of an action plan that allows midwives to support communities throughout the Northwest Territories and remove the income testing from extended health care benefits. There is a key opportunity to expand the Family Medicine Residency Program from two to four residents per year by the end of this Assembly to build local health care capacity. The committee will advocate for these actions to be advanced to support the priority and our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, the committee has concerns that the non-governmental organization (NGOs) stabilization fund remains at only \$700,000 and believes that this should be increased to \$1 million annually to better support NGOs and the critical work they do. Further, to support stability and acknowledge the vital role of the NGO sector, funding should be awarded using multi-year contributions to NGOs. The territorial government has received concrete recommendations on how to better support

NGOs. Therefore, the committee is requesting funding for the implementation of the "Strengthening the Non-Profit and Charitable Sector External Advisory Committee Final Report".

Mr. Speaker, the committee has heard the government's position that municipalities have a responsibility in emergency management; however, we have not yet seen corresponding financial resources from the territorial government to support emergency preparedness and public safety efforts for municipalities that will build their capacity. The committee is seeking a commitment to adopt a more equitable funding formula that equalizes the gap for communities across the Northwest Territories and offers more meaningful support for emergency management preparedness.

Mr. Speaker, to support safe communities and residents, we need to ensure that communities have appropriate access to RCMP services and that legislation, such as the Residential Tenancies Act, is modernized, and that our legal services, such as the Office of the Children's Lawyer, can continue to be supported.

To support the priorities of the 20th Assembly, the committee has put forward a combination policy direction and budgetary requests for Executive Council. We know that through engagement between the committee and Executive Council, we can build on the successes of previous Assemblies by showing collaboration and consensus decision-making that can succeed.

Mr. Speaker, the committee has summarized its recommendations on policy commitments and budgetary changes in response to the Government of the Northwest Territories proposed 2024-2025 Main Estimates by department, Mr. Speaker.

Education, Culture and Employment:

- Provide an update to the business plan targets that highlights the need to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes amongst JK to 12 students;
- Restore the Small Community Employment Program Fund to its 2023-2024 funding levels while changing the program to ensure only small communities, and not regional centres, can access the funding pot;
- Aurora College transformation: Mr. Speaker,.
- Reinstate the \$500,000 to fund the Centre for Learning, Teaching, and

Innovation and provide an additional \$1 million to fund the Aurora College transition team.

Environment and Climate Change:

- Create new legislation in the life of this Assembly that will support the transfer of Commissioner's land within municipalities, excluding lands currently under the interim land withdrawal and Indigenous lands, resources, and self-government agreements. This legislation should streamline the current challenges posed to municipalities to access lands, including the current requirements that a community must develop controls to manage the land, create a community plan, and that parcels must be surveyed prior to transfer;
- A commitment to establish in the business plan how the department will prioritize, action, and implement changes recommended in the 2020 Environmental Audit, recognizing that most recommendations are likely to carry into the 2025 audit.

Executive and Indigenous Affairs:

- A commitment to realign all measures within the business plan to match the measures laid out in the Homelessness Strategy;
- Establish Services NWT with offices in all regional centres and Yellowknife by 2027-2028 while also working to enhance the services offered by government service officers to build more single-window access points for government services throughout the territory;
- Restructure and reissue the Request For Proposals for the OneGov project to give opportunities for northern contractors to advance this work;
- Provide for a costed implementation plan of the Strengthening the Non-Profit and Charitable Sector External Advisory Committee final report.

Finance:

Mr. Speaker,

- Ensure a revenue neutral carbon pricing regime which itemizes how

- revenues are then reallocated through public reporting;
- Create a strategy to reduce TSC chargebacks by 10 percent across the Government of the Northwest Territories; and
- Create a plan that allows for a Tlicho administrative region for operations and capital planning purposes, removing it from the North Slave region.

Health and Social Services:

- Remove income testing for the new extended health benefits;
- Restore the proposed \$990,000 reduction to the Department of Health and Social Services and the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority regarding midwifery; and further, develop a model for traveling midwives that ultimately reduces the costs of medical travel for residents;
- A commitment to increase the Medical Residency Program from two residents to four residents by 2027-2028;
- Complete new internal job evaluations for all frontline health care staff;
- Create a new Labour Market Supplement Program for frontline staff;
- Waive the current practice standards for foreign credentials for internationally educated nurses;
- Provide a plan to phase out private health care agency nurses by 2026-2027;
- Establish clear targets for Indigenous health care training and recruitment of staff. Mr. Speaker,
- Examine and estimate the costs to introduce an Office of Practitioner Experience in the Northwest Territories health care system;
- Commitment to expand on the existing Government of the Northwest Territories Physician Workforce Plan by creating an overall health care workforce plan that contains:
 - An updated territorial model of physician services that is formalized and funded;

- An effective Territorial Primary Care Model based on equitable access and continuity; and
- A re-evaluation of the health systems leadership model.
- Provide a proposal for the creation of a dialysis unit and CT scan equipment and operations at the Inuvik Hospital;
- Provide options and costing for a mobile x-ray machine for small communities;
- An increase to support not only transitional housing for individuals in recovery of addictions but to also work with Housing Northwest Territories to increase assisted living options for adults with disabilities.

Housing NWT:

Mr. Speaker,

- A commitment to invest \$200 million in the capital plans for housing until fiscal year 2028-2029;
- Provide cost estimates to the business plan commitment that pledges to help NGOs stabilize their funding, particularly for those running supportive living facilities to keep vulnerable populations housed;
- Encourage better upkeep of public housing units by supporting resident-led collective efforts to protect their homes and neighbourhoods through the creation of incentives for housing cooperatives.

Industry Tourism and Investment:

- Provide an update to the Business Plan that sets goals to increase the value of income, employment and dollars spent on all film productions taking place in the NWT.

Infrastructure:

- Restore the Community Access Program funding to 2023-2024 levels. Furthermore, ensure that this program can be made to be more flexible to support feasibility studies such as the creation of ice roads;
- Provide a costed plan that outlines how the utility regulator, the three electrical utilities, the Government of the Northwest Territories and interested Indigenous governments, will work together to develop a short, medium, and long-term roadmap with appropriate planning, regulatory, and policy tools to enable the transformation of the Northwest Territories electricity system over the coming decades in alignment with climate

goals and building greater energy independence in the Northwest Territories;

- Restore the manager, Enterprise Records Management position at \$113,000;
- Restore the Electric Bike Rebate of \$10,000;
- Restore the Community Government Retrofits Program of \$190,000 to support energy audits and energy retrofits of community government facilities.

Justice:

- Advance the currently proposed timeline for changes to the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act with a legislative proposal by the winter sitting of 2025;
- Provide a legislative proposal that aims to modernize the Residential Tenancies Act by the winter sitting of 2025;
- Restore the Office of the Children's Lawyer by eliminating the reduction of \$200,000; and
- Provide a plan to allow for a joint RCMP detachment for Gameti and Wekweeti.

Municipal and Community Affairs:

- It has been highlighted that the municipal funding gap under the current formula cannot be closed or reduced without substantial investment. The committee is seeking a commitment to adopt a more equitable funding formula that equalizes the gap for communities across the Northwest Territories. This funding formula should fund models and new contributions which capture:
 - Operations and Maintenance;
 - Water and Waste;
 - Capital;
 - New contributions for Municipal Emergency Preparedness and Public Safety; and,
 - The ability to implement ground ambulance services to interested communities.
- Increase the annual Non-Governmental Stabilization Fund from \$700,000 to \$1 million dollars. Further to this increase, ensure that all NGO funding and contribution agreements are multi-year agreements moving forward, and that the

government works to address inflationary pressures on NGOs through these agreements.

This concludes the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight's report on the 2024-2025 Main Estimates. Members acknowledge through ongoing dialogue with the Executive Council we will work together to advance and finalize a budget that can better support the residents of the Northwest Territories.

I'd like to thank AOC and their staff for their collaborative efforts creating this document. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Reports on standing and special committees.

Let's go back to Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the AOC committee report be adopted, report (audio).

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Range Lake. Motion's in order. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

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

---Carried

Reports of standing and special committees. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Motions. 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, Minister's Statement 4-20(1), Minister's Statement 5-20(1), Minister's Statement 17-20(1), Minister's Statement 24-20(1), Tabled Document 93-20(1), with Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): I'll call committee to order. What is the wish of the committee? I'll go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the committee would like to consider Tabled Document number 093-20(1) tabled on May 24th, 2024, and with the departments of

EIA, Justice, and Health and Social Services for consideration.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. We'll proceed with the first item. Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 93-20(1), Main Estimates 2024-2025. We will now consider the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs, please proceed with your opening remarks.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm here to present the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs' main estimates for the fiscal year 2024-2025. Overall, the department's estimates propose an increase of \$1.405 million, or 6.1 percent, over the Main Estimates 2023-2024. These estimates support the mandate objectives, while continuing to meet the Government of the Northwest Territories' fiscal objectives to prioritize responsible and strategic spending.

Highlights of the proposed estimates include:

- Transfer of Integrated Service Delivery Program of \$854,000 from Department of Justice;
- Continuation of the implementation of the national action plan to end gender-based violence funding of \$2,187,000;
- Women in Leadership \$101,000; and.
- Fiscal sustainability reductions of \$838,000.

These estimates support the mandate objectives for the Department while continuing to meet the GNWT fiscal sustainability strategy objectives to ensure the fiscal health and financial future of the GNWT. This concludes my opening remarks. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Does the Minister of the Executive and Indigenous Affairs wish to bring a witness into the House?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, I do.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witness into the Chamber.

Would the Minister introduce his witnesses.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. With me, I have John MacDonald, the deputy minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs; and, Tram Do, director, shared corporate services, with the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I will now open the floor for general comments on the Department of executive and Indigenous affairs. Do any Members have general comments? Seeing no more general comments, does the committee agree to proceed? Oh, I'm sorry, I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I just wanted to start in my general comments by pointing out some of the important actions contained in the Homelessness Strategy, which is now going to be led by Executive and Indigenous Affairs. And I know that there's many actions identified in the business plans around coordinating efforts. And certainly it's not all about the money. It's partly about policies and coordination around homelessness. But I just wanted to emphasize here that it's also about the money when it comes to combatting homelessness. So I wanted to go over some of the specific recommendations in the Homelessness Strategy that was released at the very end of the last Assembly, and my hope was that it would really be carried forward into this Assembly and looked at carefully and implemented carefully. So I wanted to go over some of the recommendations there that do require additional funding.

One of the recommendations was around increasing transitional housing and supportive housing. So we need to actually increase the number of facilities that we have to meet the goals that we're setting up around functional zero homelessness in each community. And the strategy talks about first determining the need and feasibility for supportive living facilities and then increasing GNWT funding available for those programs to improve community-driven solutions.

Another recommendation was around ensuring shelter services have appropriate resources that actually reflect the needs of those users. And so one step is to first establish standards for shelters, but then also ensuring there's adequate money there to meet those standards. And I know certainly the non-profits

in Yellowknife have to make ends meet with sort of shoestring budgets and, you know, very few staff that they can afford to pay for and sometimes -- you know, to meet shelter standards, we should really be increasing staffing ratios and just increasing the resources that we're providing in order to make sure that those shelter environments are safe, both for users and for staff.

Another recommendation was around establishing long-term funding options to improve the sustainability of those non-profits that are operating shelters.

Another recommendation in the Homelessness Strategy that needs to be implemented is to add additional navigator positions. So the integrated case management program has been a pilot for quite a few years, and it's been shown to be successful, but we've been slow actually expanding those services outside of Yellowknife. And the strategy really recommends doing that, and we don't currently see resources allocated to that.

It also recommends creating peer support roles for those service users, those people accessing shelters who would benefit from having those supports and mentoring from fellow community members but perhaps don't need the intensive supports that a navigator would provide.

So those are just a few of the recommendations that do require actual resources that I wanted to get that out there before we start because I think it's easy to say that we're looking at the strategy because we're going to coordinate, but I think we also need to see the money.

I also wanted to reemphasize again that we -- another key initiative of the Department of EIA that's outlined in the business plan under, you know, the main departmental highlights, is around stabilizing non-profits and helping to sustain them.

So, again, I just wanted to highlight that we should actually be looking at the recommendations of the report that came out in the last Assembly called Strengthening the Nonprofit and Charitable Sector. There was an external advisory committee that provided some really important recommendations that need to be implemented. And, again, we don't see real numbers and funding in this budget to make that happen.

Finally, in terms of my general comments, I just wanted to comment on the role of communications. We see a large budget under EIA for corporate communications as well as Cabinet communications. And according to my calculations, those two together add up to about \$2.7 million and out of the total EIA

budget, which is about \$24 million, that's about 11 percent of the budget, which is significant, especially for a department that is doing some really important -- has some really important roles there. So to have 11 percent of the budget taken up by communications, I think we need to think about that.

So my understanding was that after devolution, communications budgets within Executive and Indigenous Affairs started to go up significantly because there was a desire to centralize communications more within the Executive and Indigenous Affairs department. And so that resulted in additional communications positions being established within corporate communications after devolution. And I think perhaps the intention, or the thought behind it, was to similarly take away some communications positions within each of the departments, but I'm not sure that that has actually happened. So what we've seen is a general growth of communications staff everywhere. And many GNWT staff have expressed their frustrations to me that they feel there's an imbalance that's developed. Perhaps too much emphasis and control over how staff can communicate with each other and with the public due to all of these communications staff, but not enough emphasis on developing the quality content in those communications and supporting staff to actually develop the content that is actually helpful and responsive to public needs. So I just wanted to offer that general reflection on the role of corporate communications. And I'll delve a little bit more into it when we go through the line by line. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Does the Minister want to respond? Okay, we'll just continue on. Is there any other Members that want to add general comments? I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I think that this is an odd Minister or department to kind of look at because it's very much a political department, and it houses the Premier and Cabinet Minister offices, and then a bunch of kind of not really statutory but, like, things that don't really fit in anywhere else. So I appreciate -- and Indigenous relations, which, of course, is crucial to how things operate. So it's very much -- it is an executive department.

But one thing I think is missing is more of a focus on that executive function. The business plans and the budget as well and how the department's structured set Executive and Indigenous Affairs up to be a coordinating body. And I think it needs to be more than that. I think it needs to be the central body that sends direction throughout the public service and to

other departments as well. And although that is -- you know, that is -- it's somewhat of a function, I still feel that it's more of an emphasis on coordination than direction. And one thing we're missing is to have a dedicated unit within this department to ensure results and delivery.

And I've spoken about this before. I still feel quite strongly that this is -- this would be an innovative function of executive that would greatly improve how we get the mandate and business plans implemented, completed, and developed in a meaningful and timely way and give support to that function as well to ensure we're not just collating departmental actions into one document but we're producing a plan with one vision with unity, with purpose, and that that's getting -- and that departments are on track to deliver on that, because at the end of the day, if we are setting political goals here we want to be -- we want to ensure that they get delivered on the ground and in our communities in particular, and we don't really have a mechanism to do that other than the individual Ministers who are then kind of working collaboratively. And that's fine, but as I've said before, we don't have that much time to be successful. Four years goes by very quickly. So the more tools we can give to the Cabinet to be successful, I think we'll get better results. And I think centralizing more of that authority within the Premier's office, in Executive and Indigenous Affairs, is the right step to take. And honestly, I think we could even consider moving the financial management board here as well and for them to play more of a centralized corporate function under the direction and supervision of the Secretariat to Cabinet and the Premier as well. Finance can still set fiscal policy but those kind of corporate controls, guidance around stat -- like, Crown corporations and divisions and contribution policies and ensuring, most importantly, that departments are sticking to their budgets and being audited correctly and all the things we look at in public accounts as being conducted.

So, yeah, I -- none of that's in here beyond what they already do. I just think there could be more strength put towards these kind of core functions and give the Premier more of an ability to be the Premier. Because regardless of how the position actually functions, the expectations from, I think, this House and the public, is that the Premier has more of a leadership role to play than just chair meetings and being a spokesperson for government. So I would very much like to see that in budgets going forward as things are refined.

I also think the homelessness should probably be handed off to the housing minister rather than stay here. I appreciate that there's many facets to this, but there's many facets to lots of

areas of public policy. You know, like, if we're talking about crime reduction and -- crime reduction, we have to talk about drugs and addiction, especially in the Northwest Territories. Like, you can't -- you know, we wouldn't say let's move to the Premier's office because it's multi-faceted. We could do that for everything and only have one Minister because everything touches on everything. So I think homelessness -- I appreciate the Premier's predecessor took a vested interest in being hands on on this file and that's, I think, why the move was made, but I think we have a Minister of housing who's very -- could be very competently take on this responsibility and provide more focus and dedication to implementing it because, of course, the Premier has a lot on his plate. So I would recommend moving that function elsewhere.

And, yeah, I think -- and I think the focus on Indigenous -- working with Indigenous governments, we heard today from the Member for Monfwi that that is bearing fruit, from her perspective, and we've heard that from others as well. And that's good that we're on the right foot and we're moving forward in that direction. But I think the other big piece is land rights agreements and implementing modern treaties. And that means shaking up how we do business in the negotiation sections -- or negotiation divisions of Indigenous Affairs. We waited a very long time. People are still waiting. And all that uncertainty and doubt that is created from not having stability with respect to Indigenous rights in the Northwest Territories is something that really needs to be corrected. So I hope that this is more than just keeping the negotiation tables -- the lights on in the negotiation rooms but actually bringing forward new innovative ideas and mandates to see success at those tables and to work effectively with the federal and Indigenous partners to complete modern treaties and land claim negotiations by the end of this term. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you for your general comments. The next Member I have on my list here now is the Member from the Sahtu. 43ds

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My comments here is to the Department of EIA. Taking a lead role in representing this institution or this mandate or this government outside of this government in building relations, I totally agree with the mandate to engage in a number of ways, including building trust and relationships with the other land title organizations out there. For a number of reasons, we have the conventions allowing you to do so. And I see a need for improvement, and I'm quite satisfied with the business plan to resolve those and expedite solutions in

particular. The only government authority we have in 33 communities is the Deline Got'ine government. So when I go there for my visit, I see huge potential and I see huge growth in a number of areas, including child development in the local schools. And adding to their growth, because of the status of self-government which allows them to approach both levels of government, both the territorial government and the federal government. In some other areas, whether it's settled claim area, and over 60 percent of our territory is in settlement title. And the unsettled areas seem to be further behind than the showcase of growth given to the powers underneath self-government status to Deline, the Deline Got'ine government. So therefore, the other candidate within the Sahtu is Colville Lake. There's a few organizations that have signed AIPs, and if we can have control of the growth that could be expedited for the conclusion of self-government agreements within this mandate, I think it's a good fit to have the Premier taking a role and addressing leadership in those communities to accomplish what we've seen already that has a proven track record and the accomplishments by the Deline Got'ine government.

So the Deline Got'ine government has set a model for community development growth, jurisdictional growth, and future growth within their capacity utilizing their strengths given to them by their status. So if it's such a good model -- and from what I see the business plan is going to help us get there, so we got three and a half years to get there. As I always said in the private sector, somebody has a legal -- the aggression to conclude your goals and objectives. In this case, it's our mandate.

And when I review the business plan, I can only imagine there would be results within three and a half years, or even sooner in some of those cases, because the next candidate that I know of that is very close to concluding the self-government status is Colville Lake. So if we achieve success in that conclusion of 90 percent, we only got 10 percent left. So I think with the proper leadership underneath this department, we can accomplish that 20 percent remaining in our term of this Assembly. And they would be the next candidate to capitalize on independence and growth as did the Deline Got'ine government.

So I raise those points there to help emphasize the interpretation of what I see within this business plan to cover the term of this Assembly so that we can have outcomes 36 months from now. That's all I got for this chapter there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you for your general comments. Next on the list I have is Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, general comments, I mean, you know, when I look through the business plan for EIA, I look specifically at the directorate as the Indigenous Intergovernmental Affairs and the Executive Council offices and, you know, there's much work to be done. And I'm appreciative of the work that's been done to date with working with Indigenous governments. I appreciate that the Premier and Cabinet continue that mantra, and I think it's great. But it's important to know that there's much work being done by the Indigenous governments, and there's much work to be done. And, you know, they have been -- and particularly this -- and I can speak to my region, of course. Particularly in my region with our two settled land claims, they are essentially going guns-a-blazing. They're building homes. They're doing major infrastructure projects. They're moving ahead. So, you know, so when I look at our responsibility as EIA and to continue to do the work that the Premier's committed to doing, and has shown that is committed to doing, we need to make sure we have the right people in those places. You know, it all can't be based in Yellowknife. We need senior people, whether that's regional directors or whether that's ADMs, you know, we need people in the regions where this work is taking place by the Indigenous governments to be our voice there as well. And when I say our voice, this government's voice. And I think that it's not only the perception that things are centralized, it's not only that -- you know, it's important that we have people in the regions where that work's being done to be able liaise, again, with the Executive Council offices and making sure that work being done and voices are being heard from the Indigenous governments. And then, of course, that also ties into the departments in the regions as well because, I mean, those positions, again, having someone in there that can tie together, whether it's housing and health and social services and infrastructure and tie them together in the regions as a one-stop place you can go if you're an Indigenous government or even if you're just an individual in that region. So I think it's key, and I would hope that that is what's being looked at when I look to the business plan to make sure that there are staff in those positions and that we have, you know, reliable, senior people in the communities working with EIA. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Any further Members that want to add to

general comments? Okay, I don't see anybody else putting their hand up. I'll continue on.

Seeing no more general comments, does the committee agree to proceed to the details contained in the tabled documents?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. We have committee agree. Committee, we will defer the department summary and review the estimates by activity summary, beginning with Cabinet support starting on page 127 with information items on page 129. Are there any questions? Page 129. Okay, I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just wondering why we're not starting on page, I believe, 123?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Go back to the Member. Before we'll go back to that item once we get through the key items. Right now we're going to start off on page 127 with information on page 129. Go back to the Member from --

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair, appreciate that clarification, okay. So my first question is actually just related to the business plan, and I think this is the appropriate place to ask the question, page 72 of the business plan. I know it was mentioned in the speech by the AOC chair there, but I just wanted to kind of express my support for having the -- strengthening the NGO and charitable sector report included and spoken to in the business plan. I would like to see us prioritize implementation of that report, cost out implementation of the report. So I'm just wondering if the Premier can respond to that.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you very much. The NGO sector is more part of EIA than ever given that EIA is now responsible for integrated service delivery. With that comes the homelessness file. The reason that integrated services and homelessness is in EIA is because when it was in Justice, and I was the justice Minister, I found that the Minister had no authority to actually integrate services, that the program with integrated case management was just a program of the Department of Justice. And so to the comments earlier about why homelessness is in EIA, it is beside integrating service as the approach we're taking is we start -- we're starting with one issue as opposed to trying to do everything all at once. And so, of course, with that comes a lot of work with NGOs. And so that is going to be core to the

work that we do over the next four years. I've had -- or three and a half years. I've had conversations with the deputy minister already about approaches to ensuring that our NGO partners do have the stability they need to address their files. Maybe I can hand it to the deputy minister for some comments on this because it is an area that we have discussed at length. Thank you chair.

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As the Premier said, we are very aware that the NGO sector needs support. Previously, the Member spoke about the report that was completed in the last government. We have that in hand, and we're looking at that actively and certainly through the lens of integrated service delivery and addressing the Homelessness Strategy. We're looking at ways in which we can support NGOs, particularly in that subgroup, but also the NGO sector at large.

One of the things that we're looking to do initially is to look at how we can break down some longstanding barriers, particularly when it comes to homelessness, information sharing, things of that nature, and trying to improve how some of the coordinated access moves forward. So we see that as a real precondition to being able to actually get to the real work of supporting our shared clients. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So my next comment, question, is, again, related to an item in the business plan, page 83. There's some discussion there on focusing on crime prevention. And this is going to relate back to comments that I have on Justice as well, but I'd like to speak to it here also. I just note the lack of targets under this business plan item. And I do think that this is very closely related with Justice. And I like that they are looking to identify barriers to service, address root causes of crime, certainly focusing on crime prevention through collaborative efforts at early intervention, but I would just note that the lack of targets attached to this goal makes me think that the department still has some work to do in terms of identifying what it is they're trying to accomplish here. So I would appreciate some commentary on this and maybe some -- maybe targets are coming, but yeah, if the Premier or the department could comment on that one. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay. Thank you, I'll move it over to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize, I was just getting my business plan sent over to me. If the Member could repeat the item he was referencing. Thank you. I apologize.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's page 83 of the business plan. The item is focus on crime prevention, identify barriers. I'll just note that there's no targets attached to that business plan item. And, yeah, the comment was, you know, if we don't have targets identified, it's a bit hard to tell kind of what the government is trying to achieve there. So I just wanted the Minister or department to kind of expand upon when they're looking to achieve here. And I would just emphasize that I think this is an important one and is closely tied to some of the goals that Justice has set. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I appreciate the Member's concerns about the lack of target. This document and the mandate were prepared almost simultaneously and so we were including items underneath each of the topics, and they aren't necessarily all fully fleshed out yet. But the idea behind this here is around integrating the services and ensuring that someone who needs access to services is able to get those services when they need them. Often, the root cause of a lot of crime is addictions issues, and so if we can support people in a way that will actually assist them, you know, get them out of that lifestyle or the criminal justice system, then that is what we want to do. So there's no targets here right now. I'm happy to work with the Members to develop some targets. But that's where we're coming from with this. Thanks.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah no, I appreciate that. And I would just kind of encourage the department to continue to work towards better defining what it is they're looking to achieve here and would emphasize that, you know, if our focus is going to be on crime prevention, you know, like I said yesterday in my kind of higher level comments, you know, there's a lot to it that does not involve simply policing, work that's done in the jails. Most of it takes place -- the work that really makes a difference takes place long before people enter the criminal justice system. So I'm excited to see this in here but want to see the targets the

department is working towards. I hope it's focused and that the targets we're looking for are outcome-oriented. So those are my comments on this page for now. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister from EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I appreciate those comments. I look forward to the Members on this. Thanks.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you. That's all my comments at this time, Mr. Chair, on this page.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Any other Members? I got the Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is related to page 80 in the business plan here on UNDRIP. I know we inherited the -- or this Assembly inherited the last Assembly's legislation on UNDRIP, which I totally agree. If it's a piece of legislation that is going to improve on the rights of Indigenous people, we do, to some extent, have those recognized rights in the Sahtu and other settlement areas. If there's any adding on powers with the existing powers we have from a modern treaty, I would say there's always room for improvement. So when I look at this, and I think of the legislation passed by the last Assembly, maybe the Premier could give us a little explanation on how this department, with your lead, will have achieved targets. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I want to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. The UNDRIP Implementation Act that was passed in the last government, as the Member said, we are legislatively required to co-develop an action plan to achieve the goals of UNDRIP with Indigenous governments. And so we are in the process of doing that right now. And that will help guide future investments that will be reflected in future budgets. Thank you.

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

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's the only question I had at this point in time on that particular page there. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'm not sure if this is the right place to ask this question, but I'm sure I'll be corrected if it's not. I guess you could look at page 72 in the business plan or you could look at page 126 in the main estimates but, again, I talked a little earlier about having the right people in the right place doing the right work. Can the department speak to what it's doing with the regional director position that's been vacant for four years in Inuvik and where that sits now?

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. We do have a plan for that position. It has not been reduced. And we're just holding off pending the approval of this budget. We don't know how things are going to go with the negotiations with Members, whether or not we're going to need to find additional money and where we might need to find that money. So I look forward to staffing that position once we are through this process, if we make it through successfully. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you. I'll go back to the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you. No, and I'm certainly happy to hear that, and I'm happy to hear that it hasn't been part of the reductions. Again, I can't stress enough how important that position is for our region and I'm sure as positions in other regions are as well, and just want to reiterate that that -- something I hear on a regular basis, certainly from constituents, and from other government departments and Indigenous governments as well. So I look forward to -- again, this thing has been -- it's been vacant for a while, and it's unfortunate. I'm disappointed it hasn't been filled prior to this point, but I'm happy to hear that the department will be moving forward on that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Is there any other Members? Okay, I'm going to go back to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So my question specifically related to Cabinet support here. Is how much money is allocated for Cabinet communications? I don't see a specific line item there. I wondered if the Minister could clarify.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. We are just looking for that information right now. We should have it -- it's under Executive Council offices I'm being told. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: (audio).

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay. We'll just hang tough here until we can find it. We're good? I'll go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So I believe that's in the next section so we can address that once we get there. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll wait until we get to that section to expand.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): is there any further questions from Members before I move on? Okay, thank you. I'm going to move on to the next -- no further questions, please turn to page 128. The Executive and Indigenous Affairs, Cabinet support, operations expenditures summary, 2024-2025 Main Statements, \$2,260,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to the corporate communications beginning on page 130 with information items on page 132. Are there any questions? Yes, I'm going to go to the Member -- sorry, I just want to make sure I get this right -- Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So in EIA's business plan under departmental highlights page 87, there is a piece around the communications functional review. So the description of this review is almost identical to the last one done in 2014, which was known as the likely report. And I'm going to argue here today that, you know, the reason that communications doesn't get better is no one really wants to fully implement the recommendations that are in that report, and departments want to continue to do what they are doing, namely, preferring to keep control of their message. And so we continue to ask, we continue to review, we continue to ask, you know, will it get better, hoping we'll get different answers that we like. So I'm really going to urge the Minister and his department to scrap this and save yourself some money.

To the Member from Yellowknife North's points, you know, it is \$2.7 million or 11 percent of the budget. The reason that communications started to centralize didn't fully realize the recommendations of the 2014 report is because it was asked to centralize and sort of control that messaging, one government, one voice. So that's why you've seen the general growth of comm staff in the central agency. I

would argue it's clarity of decision-making, not communications that are the -- is the real problem. Our communicators in the government are world class. I consider a lot of them very awesome and excellent people doing the best they can with what they have. But, yeah, I'll let the Minister speak to that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you for that, those comments. You know, comms, there's never enough communications, there's never enough information out there, and even when it's out there, people can't find it. So this is a -- it's been a no-win situation I found in my time here. There were discussions about centralizing in the last government. As the Minister of a department, a line department as they're called, I was not supportive of that given that there's the bread and butter communications that departments have to do. And, you know, I was a student when I was first elected and so I know that ECE did a lot of communications on SFA, and they were very targeted to me as a student, and I really appreciated that. And so I wanted to make sure that the departments were still able to do that. But we have needed to improve our -- I guess our political communications to get the word out there. And I appreciate the Member's comments about world class communicators because, you know, some of the people I work with, I know that they are -- that they're good at their job. So I will have a discussion with the department about the scope of this review. And I will leave it at that. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I'd be happy to talk to the Minister more fulsomely about this with suggestions. I hope he comes to committee and chats with us about it. But I really, really, really stress that, you know, in the scoping of how you want to go out on an RFP for this that you really take a really careful look at that report, talk to your communicators, find out what's working first before you spend a whole heck ton of money and time on something that will probably give you the same results. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to continue on. I'm going to go to Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So just to build on the comments which I -- I very much appreciate from Member for Great Slave, going

back to the last communications functional review, which I understand was done around 2014, 2015, can the Minister explain whether any of the recommendations from the last review were actually implemented?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So I understand that some of the recommendations were implemented, but the report was ten years ago and I don't have a good handle on what's happened in the last ten years in relation to that report. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. Next I wanted -- I want to talk about the OneGov project, which is listed in the business plans as one of the key highlights of this department. Where is the budget for OneGov; where does it fall? I'm assuming it might fall under corporate communications, but perhaps the Minister can clarify and also tell us what is the budget for OneGov both for 2024-2025 and if there's any budget plan for future years. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I believe it's in the procurement process. So we don't necessarily put the budget out before it has been approved. We want to make sure that the contractors are not bidding to the budget. They're bidding to the project. But the project itself is to create a website that is essentially a one window to the Government of the Northwest Territories. Right now, we have a number of different websites. We have a number of -- and the platform that's being used is actually quite old and not robust enough for today's modern internet. So just like physical infrastructure needs to be replaced, technological infrastructure needs to be replaced as well. And at some point in the future, if not now, it will not be functional and will have to be replaced. There are many, many orphaned web pages. I come across them myself where information's clearly outdated. It's very difficult to manage it, and so the idea is to create something that is much more user friendly for the users as well as for the people on the other end who are actually putting the content up. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go back to Yellowknife North Member.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I'm going to ask this again because I didn't get clarification. Does the government know what the cost of OneGov is at least for 2024-2025; have we budgeted for it? And if so, where is it in this budget?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Yes, there is a budget for it. I believe the budget has been shared with Members, and if not I can do that. And it is under corporate communications. But I would like to hand it to the director for more information. Thank you.

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

MS. TRAM DO: Yes, the budget for OneGov has been established. It will be a cost shared budget amongst all nine departments. The budget consists of website development, website hosting, project manager. There's an amount for 2024-2025 of \$830,000. For 2025-2026, \$530,000. And we're assuming an ongoing hosting fee after that of \$90,000. And it is a cost shared amongst nine departments. Therefore, it is not a separate capital expenditure item for this budget.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Do those numbers include internal staff costs of implementing this project, or is this all just costs that would go towards a contractor? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

MS. TRAM DO: So basically we have one position -- one project manager. They're designated for the project.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): I'll get the director to repeat that so it's clear. Thank you.

MS. TRAM DO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The project cost includes a project manager. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And it's included within the budget of -- overall budget cost.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can the Minister tell us -- well, just confirm whether the RFP process has closed, and if so, were any proposals received from NWT-based

businesses on this contract? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: The proposal -- the process is not yet closed, no. It's midstream. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I just -- I have some comments. I have heard from NWT-based businesses who looked at this RFP and strongly doubted that any NWT-based contractors would be able to bid on it given how it's designed. And so I understand that the goal of making websites more accessible is a good goal, but I believe that we could do this differently in a way that makes it more accessible to NWT-based contractors, that it could perhaps be done in stages, or designed differently to allow local businesses to work on -- especially a contract of this size. We're looking at probably over a million dollars here. I would also question the urgency of this initiative at this time when we're kind of scrimping and saving in all different departments, especially when we're looking at a project that, as far as I can tell, is unlikely to benefit our NWT economy in any meaningful way. I think I would also like to emphasize I would like to see us start by looking at the communications functional review that we're doing and finding ways to make sure that we're improving the content of our communications before we focus on sort of the how or the methods that, you know, we -- how our websites link to each other or not or, you know, how you access the information. I'd like to have us focus first on what information we're actually able to access or members of the public. I think those are all my comments now. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. I know that, you know, there's not a major huge cuts across EIA but within the Cabinet's support, can the Minister explain or briefly explain what this Public Utility Board is because I think -- well, the budget stayed the same for last fiscal year, and -- actually, it went down a bit. So you explain what this Public Utility Board is? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Public Utilities Board is the energy regulator in the Northwest Territories. So if NT Power Corporation wants to increase its prices, it has to make an application to the Public Utilities Board. We have a Minister responsible for the Public Utilities Board, and that is Minister McKay. It is arm's length from government as it is -- it regulates, you know, government entities. And the budget has remained the same, I believe, for many years. I briefly held this portfolio about four years ago, and the budget is relatively similar to what it was then. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, thank you. This Public Utility Board, because it's NTPC or energy regulators, I thought, you know, how come it's not under infrastructure or, you know, ECC because it deals with -- that's more within their department, so how come it's under EIA? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And it's a political decision, I suppose, where it lands, under which department. I would say because it is most dissimilar to EIA, it's more appropriate to be in EIA as opposed to something like infrastructure where that Minister is often also the Minister of the power corporation. And so it is to give some separation. I will say that I've often struggled with where the different regulators are located. I think it was an ad hoc approach over the years, and where they sit now is where they sit. When we get to Justice, we'll see that OROGO is in there as well, which really no rhyme or reason why it is there other than to ensure that it is not in a department that it would be -- that is too closely related. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: And for compensation and benefits, okay, so that's a number of staff, that's the staff that we have here. Like, 89 in headquarters. So that represents that number, the budget? North Slave is four -- I mean, I'm just trying -- those are -- the one below is GSO.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: And all these jobs are -- besides GSO, is there any other jobs that's allocated in small communities? Like, I know we have GSO. I

know Tlicho community have four GSO. I just wanted to know if there was any other jobs, a high level, like -- you know, not regional -- well, hopefully regional. You know, like I just wanted to know if there were other jobs that were allocated in Tlicho region. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So in this division, I don't believe so. But we have -- or sorry, I guess the PUB is -- we do have someone in the PUB in Hay River. So that's one example. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay. Since we're still on this -- well, no -- regional allocations, Cabinet support, so community allocation, so headquarter regional offices. Where are these regional offices? Because it says six, is that in -- like, I know there's nothing in Tlicho because we're still part of the North Slave. So there's a South Slave. There's Dehcho. Sahtu. Are these jobs allocated in these regions?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So I believe we're still -- we're in Cabinet support right now? That's where I sort of lost track of where things are going there.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: we're still on (audio)

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): I just want to clarify that we're still on corporate communication. And so that's where -- we're on page 132. I'll continue on. Do you have any further questions on corporate communications? Thank you.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: We're still on the community -- we're still on Cabinet support, because I'm looking at community allocation on page 129. So there's the headquarters. There's ten. But the active position here for the -- it's different, that's what I'm referring to.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: (audio).

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. We just concluded Cabinet supports over on communication, corporate communications. Okay, I think next Member, I think Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Chair. I too wanted to add to my colleague, Inuvik Boot Lake, is the fact that if we're going to build relationships with our Indigenous community, that position as regional director as we previously mentioned last week -- I believe it was -- that position covers 13 out of 33 communities and represents the government in three settled land claim jurisdictions. So it just adds to the importance of the role and the functions of the role and, in particular, representing this government in those jurisdictions. So I just emphasize the need, and, for the record, I support the quicker the better we can fill this regional director position to help bridge the gap on communications and relationships and partnerships and dialogue for improvement to the 20th Assembly. Mahsi.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Sure, I won't comment. I believe that's in the previous section so I'll just -- I don't want to -- the puck drops in about an hour so I don't want to take up too much time with going back. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Any further questions? Okay, don't see no further questions. I'll continue on.

Executive and Indigenous Affairs, corporate communications, operations expenditure summary, 2024-2025 Main Estimates, \$1,417,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to directorate beginning on page 133 with information items on page 135 to 137. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do have questions on this one, again related to the business plan, which contains all the juicy information, page 72 in this case. So there's a couple items in there with relation to a negotiating self-government and other Indigenous rights agreements. And so the first question I'll ask on that is just the actions to support the mandate commitment, is EIA working with departments who will review the GNWT principles and interests to explore possible updates? You know, I just -- I would note to the Premier that it seems at face value as a bit of an underwhelming commitment. It doesn't seem like a strong commitment to kind of get these agreements done. So I was just wanting to -- if the Premier or department could kind of speak to this item and what they are looking to achieve with it and what their goals are for the term of this Assembly with relation to

self-government and Indigenous rights agreements. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I think we're skipping ahead a couple sections this time, but I will say that in terms of the negotiations when it comes to the budget, I think that we can do what we need to do within the budget. I've been meeting with the negotiators. I've been talking to the departments. I've been expressing my views on how we need to proceed. And I've been meeting with Indigenous governments. And the department will be bringing forward options to try and get by some of these roadblocks on some of these negotiations. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, yeah, the Premier's right. I just realized that I am asking questions related to a page that's coming up so I'll keep those questions for that time. I don't have questions on this specific page. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): All right, thank you. Is there any further questions from Members? Seeing none. Oh, I'm going to -- I got Member from the Dehcho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The funding for the Women's Initiatives and Native Women's Association and Status of Women Council, these -- they're all funded like for three -- they get multi-year funding; right? Or is it just one-year funding at a time? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Multi-year funding. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Dehcho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you. That's all I wanted to know. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Is there any further questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just had one question under this. The gender-based violence fund -- and I'm not sure -- I know that the national action plan to end gender-based violence has funding, and it's sprinkled in a couple places throughout this budget, but I'll attack about what's here. I'm not -- I'm

wondering if the gender-based violence fund, which provides \$125,000 per community or project, is that fully subscribed? And perhaps the Minister could comment -- it looks like last year in this line item, on page 135, there's \$1.68 million that was allocated last fiscal year, and this fiscal year, \$1.648 million. Can the Minister talk about whether all of that money was distributed, was it fully subscribed, or are we leaving money on the table when it comes to gender-based violence initiatives.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I'd like to -- through you, Mr. Chair, I would like to hand it to the director.

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

MS. TRAM DO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the \$1,648,000 for national action to end the gender-based violence, \$200,000 of that is for internal salaries and benefits, and the remainder is to be given out in grants and contributions. Also to note with that, \$630,000 of that amount goes to NWT Housing as well. So out of the 1.648, \$630,000 goes to housing, and then the remainder goes to grants and contributions based on applications to the program, and it is distributed that way.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so for last year for 2023-2024, can the Minister clarify whether or not all of the money that was allocated toward grants and contributions was actually allocated to deserving organizations? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: I'd like to hand it to the director.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll turn it over to the director.

MS. TRAM DO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the start of the program was mid year, and we also had the evacuation and the election, so hence not all of the budgeted allocations were spent. For 2023-2024, we are carrying a surplus. The surplus is to be spent by September 30th, and we're hopeful to have all of the allocations from the surplus amounts completed by then. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's good to know. I just want us to do everything we can to make sure that -- there's tons of work to be done out there and tons of organizations doing this kind of work, so I just want to make sure that the dots are being connected and we're getting all this money out the door. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Any further questions? Okay, I'm going to continue on. No further questions.

Please turn to page 134. The Executive and Indigenous Affairs, directorate, operations expenditure summary, 2024-2025 Main Estimates, \$9,457,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to the council's office beginning on page 138 with information item on page 140. Are there any questions?

Seeing no questions. I'll continue on. Oh, sorry. Member from the Dehcho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Looking back at directorate -- or when we go back and we look at all the staff that's in the Premier's office and executive and Indigenous affairs office, the organizational chart and account structural chart. I have people asking me why is the department so heavy on -- like, top heavy, and can some of those positions -- like, do they really need all of those positions in that office? Or -- and can some of that money be used in -- well, they're just saying it's top heavy. And that's what I wanted to say, it's top heavy and we could use money from those positions in other programs that we need money in our communities for. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So in this activity that we're discussing, Executive Council offices, there's the Ministers' offices and there's the Premier's offices. I would say that I could use a couple more Ministers to distribute the workload. So it could even get a little more top heavy in this area. But, you know, that's a constant criticism of government, that it's top heavy. We always hear it. But I have to say that in this area here, I think it's probably a little thin. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from the Dehcho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you. That's all I have to say for that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Before I continue on, Members, the Speaker has advised that he wishes to re-enter the Chamber to put committee into extended hours. I will ask the Minister to return to his seat. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witnesses out of the chambers. Members, I will suspend Committee of the Whole.

---SHORT RECESS

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, colleagues. I was a bad Speaker, and I left you guys without authorization to stay extended hours. So, I know, bad me.

By the authority given to me as Speaker under Rule 2.2(4), I hereby authorize the House to sit beyond the daily hours of adjournment to consider the business of the House.

And I will turn it back to the Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh, back to the chair.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I will continue on. Members, I will now call Committee of the Whole back to order. Minister, please return to the witness table, and sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witnesses into the Chamber.

Members, we will resume with the Executive Council offices in the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs. And do any Members have any further questions? Any further questions from Members? Seeing no hands, I'll continue on.

Executive and Indigenous Affairs, Executive Council office, operations expenditure summary, 2024-2025 Main Estimates, \$3,951,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to the Indigenous and Intergovernmental Affairs on page 141 with information items on page 143 and 144. Are there any questions? Yes, I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is more of, again, a business plan question. On page 22 -- no, that's not true. That's not the entire -- 89 of the business plan, it speaks to EIA's federal engagement approach. I'm curious what work intergovernmental affairs

has done thus far on the federal engagement approach for the 20th Assembly and what timelines we're looking at to see that here in this House? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. There won't be a document; there won't be a plan to be tabled in the House. We are developing an approach to working with the federal government, but we have too many strategies, too many frameworks that we spend a lot of time developing but not enough time implementing, and so we are implementing an approach to federal engagement. And we have the mandate done, hopefully the budget will be passed soon, and hopefully I'll be heading to Ottawa right after this so that we can begin those engagements. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can the Minister speak to whether his Cabinet will be using the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework again in this Assembly? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, thank you. So the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, it's actually a federal document. We think it's a good document. We just need some implementation from the federal government. There are pieces here and there, but we really want to see them invest in the spirit of that document. Perhaps I can get the deputy minister to speak some more on this. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As the Minister mentioned, the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework is a federal strategic policy document. To date, we've been waiting to see some financial contributions to bring that document to life. So it does come up on just about every -- during every meeting that territorial government officials have with their federal counterparts. So I think it's fair to say that it will continue to have life during our discussions in the coming years.

And with respect to the approach that the Premier was discussing, we really are trying to employ disciplined approach focus and activate the public service to work effectively with their federal counterparts to prepare for political

conversations that can be successful. So I think that's a basic principle of what we're looking to achieve over the next three and a half years. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, really, more a comment than a question -- well, actually, I'll put a question in there just for kicks. That's good to hear. But fundamentally I think it would give some comfort and understanding on this side of the House of how you wish to strategize generally. If there is not a document to be tabled, perhaps a briefing could be arranged with AOC. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I would be more than happy to brief the committee. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll move to Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: I'm all right for now, thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. The next Member on the list I have on the list is from the Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, so I'm going to go back to the questions I was asking earlier as the Premier rightfully pointed out I was in the wrong section. I'm still in the process of familiarizing myself with the great machine that is our government.

So, yeah, back to that question, I think I'd repose it. I'm just looking for kind of some explanation as to what the government's goals are for self-government and Indigenous rights agreements over the term of this Assembly. You know, publishing updates to the GNWT principles and interests just does not seem like a very ambitious goal, and so I'm kind of looking to the Premier to indicate how we are challenging the status quo with this item.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So it's -- you know, in the last government the mandate commitments were to settle land claims. Well, that's just what we're supposed to be doing. And so the way to do that is look at the negotiations, figure out what the issues are, figure out where the GNWT perhaps needs to change its position or align itself with an

Indigenous government to work together to help change Canada's position, and then make those changes in the negotiating mandates. And that may be uncomfortable. That may be a departure from the way things have been done in the past. But we need to push the envelope because we heard comments earlier about the money that is brought into the territory, the capacity that is built when claims are settled. That really is I think the key to supporting the regions and bringing wealth into the territory and spreading it out around the territory. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I do appreciate the Premier providing that clarity because I think it'll help the public kind of better understand what we're trying to achieve. And maybe if we just push a little bit, I mean, does the Premier kind of have any updates for committee on whether there's any indication that we will see a settled claim within the term of this Assembly? Are we moving forward, or are things currently stalled? I'm kind of curious to hear some more comment on that.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And there are some promising tables. Hope to see some things settled during this government. I don't really want to get into specifics. As they are in negotiations, I don't want to poison the well as they say, but -- and the thing about negotiations that I've learned is sometimes you start a term and the ones you're furthest ahead on are the ones you're the furthest behind on at the end of the term. And it's things that are completely out of our control. An Indigenous government might want to just take some more time at that particular point in the process, and we have to sit there and wait, which is what needs to happen. So while I want to move as quickly as we can on these files, that being said we're only one of three parties at the table. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And that is understandable, so I won't continue to push on that one. But just moving one item down on the same page in the business plan, exploring options to support economic reconciliation. Certainly, I was -- I had the privilege of sitting in on the Indigenous economic forum that occurred in April, and I was very excited by what I was hearing there. And I just note that

the -- again, like, speaking to measures and targets, the measures that we have here are a number of funding agreements. And I don't think we've really identified a target in terms of what are we trying to achieve with those funding agreements, because we could have a lot of funding agreements and not really be achieving the aims that we're looking to. So I guess I have two questions on this one.

One is whether the Council of Leaders was approached and spoken to about this specific item and given the opportunity to provide some opinion as to what we should be trying to achieve together and whether we have -- whether the department has any comments on sort of development of targets recognizing what we discussed earlier that, you know, I do recognize the business plans were put together quite quickly, but I would like to hear from the department as to kind of what they're working in terms of fleshing out this idea. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. When we talk about economic reconciliation, we need to approach that from a number of fronts. We are working on an Indigenous procurement policy. We do have agreements such as with the economic agreement with the Tlicho -- the exact name escapes me at this moment. We are also working on the UNDRIP Implementation Act action plan. And I expect that there would be economic aspects identified in there. We are working with the Council of Leaders and the economy has been flagged as one of the major issues that the Indigenous governments want to address this term. And so I'm excited about that. And so at the upcoming meeting, we're going to be having some in-depth discussions about that and how we can work together going forward. There's a recognition across the board by GNWT, by Indigenous governments, by the general public that we are in a transition phase right now with the diamond mines maturing and that we need to ensure that we have opportunities in the future. And so like I always say, we can't do that alone, we need to work with the Indigenous governments, and that's the plan. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll leave with a comment, and that is just that, you know, I see the business plan as a live document. I know that there's going to be updates brought to it every year. And so I just hope that Cabinet and the Premier can kind of work with the

Council of Leaders, identify some targets that we're going to work towards so we can be focused in implementation of our priorities. And I'll just keep hammering back on that focus item we -- if we're not focused, if we're trying to do everything, I think it's going to be much harder to achieve our goals. So that's my comments for now, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much on this section.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Is there any further questions? I'm going to go to the Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I too want to add and support the engagements both at the federal level and the territorial level with the other Indigenous organizations. An economic reconciliation is a common drive. One standard chapter within these claims that could be allowed to build on so you have a common ground of engagement to economic reconciliation would be that permitted activities within these different land claims, which allows expenditure of capital. And it could be done through a co-partnership arrangement. So that door can be opened to do a number of things for economic reconciliation. It could allow the claimant corporations to meet this government halfway through various initiatives. So I would suggest that the department familiarize themselves with the chapter on permitted activities. So that's more of a recommendation or a suggestion.

My question is related to the Ottawa office. And what are the intentions of utilizing the office in Ottawa to its fullest potential and help mitigate or bridge the gap with federal engagements with this organization as well as joint cooperative organizations with the claimant corporations? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so there is an office in Ottawa that is leased by the GNWT. There has been a position associated with that office. That is proposed as a reduction, that position. But we have a number of years left on that lease. And so we are looking at how to best utilize that space, and there are discussions happening. I know that the space is used by Indigenous governments, by negotiators, by Regular Members. I used the office myself as a Regular Member. So we definitely see the value in it. We want to be able to bring federal Ministers into our space in Ottawa, take them out of their element a little bit. So there are plans for that office. Thank you.

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

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

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. It's 5 to six. If there's no further questions, I'm going to go to the Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: In your business plan on page 88, it says here integrated service delivery and it says here the description of work. But I just wanted to ask that -- in the business plan, page 89 -- or 88, can the Minister explain what this integrated service delivery model is?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Sure, thank you. So I'm not sure where this is contained in this document but -- relative to where we are now, but integrated service delivery is a way of doing business where you design and deliver programs and services for the person. You don't design them in a way that is most efficient or, rather, most convenient for government. You design it with the convenience of the person in mind so that they can actually access all of the services they need easily. And so we are looking at various ways of doing that. Initially, there was a thought that we would just start integrating services across government. Through looking at the issue, working with outside contractors and working internally, it was determined the best way to go was to focus on an issue first. So that's why we are focusing on homelessness first, to work to integrate services for that population. We're also looking at creating sites around the territory, likely in regional centres where we're going to be co-locating services as well. So that's the next step. So these are some of the things that we're doing under integrated service delivery. And the reason it was brought into the Premier's office is because we need someone -- we need the authority to force departments to integrate their services. When I was the Minister of ECE and the Minister of Justice, there was even issues getting ECE and Justice to work together. So that is why that is in here. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Yes, because it says here on the other side implementation of NWT homelessness, anti-poverty, alcohol strategies, and coordination of GNWT strategies associated with food security, etcetera. So you said regional. So it was -- for Tlicho region, we have TCSA. I'm just wondering, like, are they going to -- if they do that with the regional director, are

some of the regions going to be getting these positions, or they will be -- some of these will be transferred to the regions to regional office?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So in Indigenous and intergovernmental affairs, the division we're currently discussing in the main estimates, there won't be any movement. What we're talking about with integrated service delivery is co-locating GNWT services. So it could be housing and income assistance and social services. But those are existing positions; it's just a matter of getting them physically close to each other, ensuring there's proper agreements in place so that they can share information amongst themselves. And there are opportunities to work with Indigenous governments as well. I know that TCSA has been a leader in integrating services over the years, and so I think it would be a perfect fit. And I did raise this at the bilateral as an opportunity. We haven't had really in-depth discussions yet. But somewhere like Behchoko would be a great place to try this out. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Yeah, that's what -- that's what -- yeah, I agree with you. It's like a commitment. There, so that's good to know. I like that, so. But no, because it's good, you know, because I feel when you look at all the GNWT departments, there's lots of duplications, you know, lots of -- it's just that it's -- there's a lot of duplication within government services and I think this is a good way of reducing some because, you know, like there's -- like, we just talked about the utility boards. There's ECC and Infrastructure and maybe ITI. And so there is overlapping of lots of services so I think this will help to reduce, and it's going to help with serving the people, especially in the small communities or in the regions. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Yes, thank you. That's just taken as a comment. I think what I'll do is if there's no further questions from anybody, I'm just going to stop there. Okay, I'll go to -- before, give me one minute here.

The next one here is -- no further questions. Please turn to page 142, the Executive and Indigenous Affairs, Indigenous and intergovernmental affairs, operations expenditure summary, 2024-2025 Main Estimates, \$7,168,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. We'll stop there, and we'll take a short recess. And I'll ring the bell and we'll continue on. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, everybody to their seats. Order. Cousin. Thank you, we will continue on. We just took a short break. I'm going to continue on.

There are additional information items from pages 145 to 147. Are there any questions? Any questions? Don't see any hands up. Okay, I'll continue on.

Thank you, Members, please return to the department summary found on page 123 and revenue summary information item on page 124. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is where in this department's budget might we find money for the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you. I want to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You can find it in this budget and budgets all across the GNWT because it is a government-wide approach. But the deputy minister can provide more specifics. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Yes, thank you. I'm going to go to the director -- or sorry, deputy minister.

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Integrated service delivery dollars were transferred from Department of Justice to Executive and Indigenous Affairs. They're currently located in the directorate activity. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you for that. Are you able to tell us how much money is allocated under the directorate for integrated service delivery?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: So with the transfer of integrated case management unit from the Department of Justice, along came \$854,000 with that. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you for that. And is there any money, either as part of that or somewhere else, for action items to be implemented as part of the Homelessness Strategy that have to do with, you know, better supporting shelters, to provide wraparound services? So aside from, you know, staffing positions within the government, are there dollars allocated within that that could be grants or contributions to organizations that are delivering services to -- that relate to homelessness? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So when we integrate services, we integrate them from all departments, and so the money that the Member's referring to exists in health's budget, in housing's budget. Perhaps the deputy minister can provide a bit more detail. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And maybe just to build on the Premier's remarks, much of what integrated service delivery will involve, at least initially, is working to make better use of existing resources across government. But I would say that, to the Member's question, this also touches on federal engagement. It touches on the federal budget 2024. There were significant announcements related to housing and included within that are opportunities for funding related specifically for homelessness. As is typically the case, when the federal government does make announcements for budget, it takes them a few months to have policy clarity that they can share with partners. So we're looking to work closely with our federal counterparts over the next couple of months to see what we can do to bring funding into the territory for some of the purposes that the Member has mentioned. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So that is encouraging news. Can the Minister tell us when we go to the federal government to try to negotiate more money for homelessness, are we also looking -- so in addition to looking for capital dollars for new shelters or living facilities, are we looking for operational dollars to support existing or new facilities that might

support street involved populations? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go to the Minister of EIA.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I will hand it over to the deputy minister. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The short answer is, yes, we know that there are a number of federal programs that were announced. The policy parameters, some application-based, others different methods of disbursement of funds, some funding for Indigenous governments, some for provincial, territorial governments, some for NGOs. So there really is a bit of work to do to explore what that looks like. We are watching closely as the federal government negotiates with other provinces already around how to make that funding easier to access. So we're looking to embark on those conversations essentially as soon as this legislative session is concluded. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I definitely look forward to continuing these conversations and ensuring that we continue to actually implement the recommendations in the Homelessness Strategy. That's it for now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Any further questions, Members? I don't see any hands up. I'm going to continue on.

Thank you, Members. Please return to now to the department summary found on page 123 -- oh, hang on. Sorry, seeing no further questions, committee, I will now call the department summary, Executive and Indigenous Affairs, operations expenditures, total department of 2024-2025 Main Estimates, of \$24,253,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, I'm going to go back to the Member from Yellowknife North.

COMMITTEE MOTION 5-20(1):
TABLED DOCUMENT 93-20(1): MAIN
ESTIMATES 2024-2025, DEFERRAL OF
DEPARTMENT – EXECUTIVE AND
INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS,
CARRIED

MS. MORGAN: Mr. Chair, I move that this committee defer further consideration of the main estimates for the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs at this time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): The motion is in order. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried. Consideration of the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs, operations expenditures, 2024-2025 Main Estimates, total department, is deferred. Thank you.

---Carried

Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing before us. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witnesses from the Chamber. Committee, we will now move onto the next department.

Okay, thank you, we'll continue on. Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 93-20(1), Main Estimates 2024-2025. We will now consider the Department of Justice.

Minister of Justice, please proceed with your opening remarks.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm here to present the 2024-2025 Main Estimates for the Department of Justice. Overall, the Department's estimates propose an increase of \$3.8 million, or 2.6 percent, over the 2023-2024 Main Estimates. These estimates support the mandate objectives for the department while continuing to meet the GNWT's fiscal objectives to prioritize responsible and strategic spending.

Highlights of the proposed estimates include:

- Forced growth funding of \$1.9 million which consists of additional policing resources for Fort Providence, the establishment of the RCMP "G" Division Territorial Crime Reduction Unit, and the implementation of a full-time Emergency Response Team for "G" Division;
- other adjustments of \$5.1 million, which includes \$3.3 million for the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program Framework Agreement, \$985,000 for Technology Service Centre chargebacks; and, \$889,000 for various federal cost shared agreements;

- Reductions of \$2.9 million, which includes the closure of the Fort Smith Correctional Complex Men's Unit and a reduction in the Office of the Children's Lawyer;
- Initiatives funding of \$270,000 which continues funding of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Shared Services office;
- Transfers of \$854,000 for the Integrated Case Management office to the Department of EIA;
- Sunsets of \$747,000.

These estimates support the priorities of the 20th Assembly and the vision of Budget 2024 by contributing to a strong economic foundation, working together with partners, and to keep communities safe and deliver accessible programs and services to residents. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Does the Minister of Justice wish to bring witnesses into this House?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, I do.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witness into the Chamber.

Thank you. Would the Minister please introduce his witnesses.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: With me I have Charlene Doolittle, deputy minister of the Department of Justice, and James Bancroft, director of corporate services. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I will now open the floor for general comments on the Department of Justice. Do any Members have general comments? I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm hoping this can be a bit of a Q and A because I'm interested to hear from the Minister how we can build better on-the-ground outreach services that integrate or work with law enforcement and teams of social workers, health support workers, to ensure that we have a better way of addressing social issues that are not necessarily criminal in nature but that often get, you know, punted to the RCMP out of lack of having other places to call. And so my understanding is that the Minister's interested

in this idea but I don't see it in the business plan so far. But can the Minister explain how we might start going about putting an approach like this in place and what his plan might be for it? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So that's a pretty big question. The puck has dropped so I will try and keep things short. But there are -- when we talk about crime and crime reduction, and I always say, you know, enforcement is just one part of it, and the department is responsible for enforcement but also looking at other ways to address those issues. So one program that has been running a few years, although, you know, interrupted with many of the events we have seen as a territory, is the Community Safety Officer Program. So that's one where it is not an enforcement unit. It is community members who work with individuals to help, I guess, avoid situations where the police might be involved. And it could be -- the thing that always sticks in my mind is just giving people a ride home from a party. If there's a woman, instead of having her walk home perhaps intoxicated, they might give her a ride. So those kind of little things in the community can go a long way. Of course, there's other departments who are involved with things like funding the Street Outreach Program. We talked just recently about integrated service delivery in the Department of EIA and how that can assist individuals stay out of the criminal justice system. We also provide funding for men's healing program to help prevent men from committing acts of intimate partner violence. So there are a number of ways. But the question is bigger than the Department of Justice. It is cross-departmental and going forward, like I've said before, we've added RCMP across the territory every year since I have been Minister. I think it's now time to look at how can we supplement the services they offer with some of those more social services by partnering with other organizations. There's nothing -- the business plan doesn't speak to that or the mains at this point, but that is the path that I'd like to see us go down. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In some other jurisdictions, they have some innovative models where law enforcement might partner with health workers or counsellors so that if you call an emergency line -- say someone calls 9-1-1, if they're having a mental health crisis or something, currently, you know, the options are

send ambulance or send RCMP. But in other jurisdictions, there's models where there's sort of a third option where you could send, you know, crisis counsellors or people with more appropriate training to deal with mental health crisis. Is this something that the Minister is willing to look into? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So I think we would be the minor partner in that program. That would likely be something the department of health would lead if we're talking about mental health workers responding to crises. So I'm happy to work with the department of health examining things like that, and that's sort of the model that I was speaking of. But we would not be the lead department on something like that, depending on what this hypothetical model would look like. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll leave it there for now, but I just wanted to make sure that this idea stays on the radar. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Any further questions from Members? I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: I have general comments rather than questions, but the Premier's free to ask -- or to answer or speak to what I have to say. But I'm quite pleased with what's being proposed in the main estimates and also the business plan. The legislative agenda for this department is sufficiently robust in both the kind of machinery of government -- or machinery of the public service that has to bring forward things like Miscellaneous Statute Law Amendment Acts and the Legislation Act and the unsexy pieces of legislation. Forgive that -- forgive me if that's unparliamentary but that's really what it is. But we do have some very -- an ambitious agenda for improving public safety and giving law enforcement the tools it needs to succeed.

I have -- you know, this is -- the issue of crime prevention and crime reduction is not one -- it's not solved by more police on its own, but we do need to have a robust response to organized crime. And what's been increasingly apparent is we have a drug crime problem and an organized crime problem that are intertwined and taking advantage of our most vulnerable citizens, particularly in the small communities. If we do not have a robust law enforcement response to these predators, we are not going to be able to keep communities safe.

I have never seen so much violence in my hometown of Yellowknife as I have this -- these last few years, since the pandemic. There have been murders every month this year I think, including, you know, newly discovered ones that are -- or suspicious deaths that are most likely related to drug crime. There are handguns found throughout the city now, not long guns but handguns. Crack cocaine is everywhere, in every community. These are not caused by a public health addictions problem. These are caused by gangsters from the south who are, again, taking advantage of our most vulnerable citizens. So we need a multifaceted approach. I think over the years, governments have been investing in social support and infrastructure. We've seen Housing First be rolled out in the Northwest Territories to varying degrees of success. We've seen the men's healing program be redeveloped and reoffered. We have -- the judiciary has been very active in supporting different ways of dealing with criminality. And integrated case management started in the Department of Justice for chronic recidivists and users of the system. So I think we have been trying to get a handle on it, throwing a lot at it, you know, and then it's all underpinned by intergenerational trauma and the legacy of cultural genocide that was the mission of the Canadian government, the colonial Canadian government that they still must make amends for. But regardless of that reality, regardless of the systemic factors that lead us here and continue to keep people trapped in poverty, trapped in addictions and difficult to treat, it does not change the reality that we have armed thugs in our communities praying upon these people, and we need to give police the tools to deal with that. And this budget does that in a significant way. And I'm very pleased to see that, that it was not something we needed to fight for. It was not something we disagreed with with the Minister, with the Cabinet, with the Premier. It's something we can all get behind. And, yeah, we can do more than just cops, absolutely. I think that's underway. I think we have resources in other departments as well, and we have a commitment from this -- from the Premier, from this Minister, to integrate those services so it is not just a one-lens approach to this problem. But if we neglect the support we need for law enforcement, we are not going to address, you know, the people who are making the problem worse in our communities. And that's what I wanted to say today. I'll have other commentary for key activities, but this is a big issue for me. This is -- you know, I have a relatively quiet suburban part of Yellowknife that is my riding of Range Lake, and even out there in a residential dense area, people are feeling unsafe which I didn't -- you know, again, growing up here, I didn't think it would ever feel this way. I thought

we were removed -- not immune, but certainly removed from the worst of it, and that's just not the case anymore. So I'm hoping that with this budget, we can start to take action and turn the page on this, bring these predators to justice, and protect the people who need protecting the most in the Northwest Territories. Thank you. And thank you to the Premier for bringing this ambitious budget forward. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you for your comments. I'm going to go on to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I echo the comments of my friend, MLA from Range Lake. I'm not saying he stole my thunder; I think he's added to it. But it's good to hear that because we hear that a lot in the small communities, and often times you wonder if the MLAs outside of the smaller communities understand what it's doing. Because it is destroying small communities, not just -- it's not just a problem, it is destroying small communities. Drug addiction, the influx of gangs, the influx of drug dealers, is destroying it. And I bet to say every MLA here from a small community will tell you they get weekly, if not daily, phone calls from people with concerns and/or complaints or are scared or they're an elder living in the building that they know there's issues going on. If you've campaigned like I did, you've probably seen it with your own two eyes. People living in a unit and drug dealers actually in there with them, you know, paying them sums of money to go to a door and hand out drugs. It's ridiculous. And we talked about well, why aren't there that many people at Aurora College? Well, they're not in Aurora College because they're doing other things they shouldn't be doing and it's -- again, it's a massive, massive problem. More than I think we even realize, and it's going to destroy small communities.

So, again, as my friend from Range Lake said, I applaud the department for putting the extra funding in. I would say is it even enough? You know, we have to -- we have to focus our efforts on this. We have to. And I know it's interdepartmental. I know there are other things that we need to do, whether it's treatment centres, where it's aftercare programs, where it's housing initiatives. All those things tie into this. But at the end of the day, it's justice. It's we need to make sure we make people safe. And, yeah, and I applaud it too. As I I don't have a question, but I did want to make that comment because it's so important. And I hear it regularly. And I'm glad that MLAs in Yellowknife hear it regularly as well because it is devastating for our small communities. Absolutely devastating.

So yeah, I would support more, Mr. Premier. So, yeah, I think it's great, a good start. Let's -- you know, let's get moving on this. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you, for your comments. The next on my list here, I got the Member from the Dehcho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Yeah, thank you. I too want to say -- reiterate what the last two Members talked about. This department needs to work together and protect people. Crime rates in my region, I could say for a couple of the communities in my region, is very high. People are afraid, and lives are being destroyed because of the drug trade. And, yeah, so what I have to say, I guess, is give the police the support that they need to combat these crimes that are happening in our communities. It's sad to say that people in my community of Fort Providence can't even leave their homes unless there's somebody there to watch their house because it seems like every night a person's gone, somebody's breaking in their house. And people don't have the resources to help the police, I guess. And so it's causing a lot of chaos in the community. The crime rate is high. I went to a court proceeding one time. It was standing room only. So we need support in all the departments from health to education need to work together to help the people somehow and, like, community wellness to do something to help the people. Community justice, there's young people that are getting charged for first-time offences because there's no committee in place, stuff like that. Those things don't need to happen this day and age. So that's what I wanted to say. So thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you for your comments. And I'm going to go to the Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I too support a hundred percent here on the three previous speakers, on the emphasis. And I can't stress enough the need to focus on today's society. Today's society is plagued with a lack of work, lack of industry. It's really designed to plague on the weak ones and the weak ones are vulnerable and in comes these opportunists with their drugs. And to me, it's really shocking. I have never seen my home community in Fort Good Hope so torn apart by the influx of drugs. And now we're getting phone calls, as the Member from Boot Lake said, as late as 9, 10 o'clock at night. I think if we all witnessed that, we would understand the need for capital to address the society today.

To give you an example, another example of many, we invited the Ministers of Infrastructure and Finance to the Sahtu communities, and we

went to Fort Good Hope. The amount of questions was just unbelievably long because people out there are waiting for the authorities to come to their communities to offload their concerns to the appropriate individuals, to help with the redesigning and bringing back the traditional values to our communities, which are basically lost. There seems to be no industry there. Just to gauge that, are we making new initiatives to attract investment by the closure of the OROGO office when we haven't even really did a rights issue and sale? We cannot say that the rights issue and sale has respondents in the neighbourhood of five, ten oil companies, because we haven't done that. But yet we're going to take an inactive approach by shutting that office down when we haven't even gauged its potential.

And I really emphasize the need for, and I encourage every Member of Cabinet to go to the communities, spend a night there, listen to the elders, the parents.

The workforce opportunity in the private sector is so low, responses to national competitions are left with no responses. Zero. How can we encourage the outcomes of education when that workforce or that age group is plagued with addictions? And yet we throw more money on what is probably not going to materialize. So I think we got to learn to go to the root of the problem and design our business plan to address the weaknesses of society in our area.

We've got a weak energy sector. I would say we would all be shocked tomorrow to find out the number of employees that did not show up. I see that every day. And as a result of your employees not showing up, no production is done. This is why our public buildings are deteriorating, because of lack of maintenance. Now is the summertime to winterize and improve your efficiency of the building, including maintaining those boilers. But yet on the other hand, if we don't got employees showing up, it ain't going to get done.

So those are just some of the examples, but you got to really experience the examples by going to these smaller communities and talking and listening to people. Some of them may not be encouraged in a public forum but if the invitation was there to meet one on one, I would say we would all be shocked on the amount of requests we're going to get to meet privately to discuss the troubling drug and alcohol problems that we're facing. And as a result of that, today's society is -- I actually feel sorry for a lot of people that I see, whether it's at Stanton Hospital or out in the regional health centres. So being mindful of the resources' need, where the priority is, if we stay the course, I think we can see positive rehabilitation outcomes and a

reformed society out there. And I'll have questions in this department at the appropriate activity there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you for your comments. I'm going to go to the Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Yesterday I talked about the drug problem, drugs and crimes in my region. Not just my region, but it's in all of the small communities. And, yes, Mr. Rodgers is right that, you know, it is destroying our communities. It's destroying the life of our young people. It's a major issue. It's a big problem, especially in small communities because we don't have lots of resources in small communities but the drugs are coming in -- like even taxi coming in from larger regional centre to small communities when they know the RCMP are off the road when they're not working. You know, like they come at certain time to do drop off. That's another issue too that's -- you know, it's not healthy.

In my community this past weekend, this was an incident that happened, but nobody told us. Like, we have -- I mean, I haven't heard from the authority or anybody that, you know, what happened because there was a lot of people. There was, like, the army. There was the SWAT team. It's involving drugs. But, like, I mean, it was a chaos for a while. There was -- it was busy and then all of a sudden everything died down. And it happened this past weekend. And we don't even know, like -- there's lots of rumors going around but I don't want to repeat any of those rumors, you know. Like, it's just -- it's not right for me to do that. But -- so that happened. And in small communities, you know, like, for -- I do like the fact that there's a lot of RCMP because with a lot of RCMP present in my community, we do feel okay. We do feel a bit safe. But it just goes to show that for -- based on per capita for my community, we shouldn't have that much amount of RCMP presence. So it just goes to show that we do have a major issue, you know, in my region, in my community. So I just wanted -- I want to say it's not right but it's just that -- it's not fair for my -- the constituents in my region, you know, one of the community -- two communities, they don't have any police services. So they don't feel safe, you know, because they don't have no RCMP detachment. They don't have nothing there. So they are more vulnerable than some of our people. But with the drug activities, the vulnerable people, the elders, the little children, are most affected. And we have lots of children that are in care already but because of this drug activities, there's more children in care. It's a voluntary agreement. But if it wasn't for grandparents, I think there would be more than

100 percent of children in care. But it's not happening. So what we need more is that for me, I think we need to start with the youth, with the children. We need to introduce -- we need to talk to the young people, or we need to have an awareness or an education program starting -- or have it part of our education curriculum, school curriculum starting with JK. I know they're young, but they know what's going on too. They know why they're sleeping at grandma and grandpa's house, you know, like so they know what's going on. They can feel it. They can see. And they can hear it. So it does have a major impact on a lot of community members.

There's a lot of good people living in small communities. I cannot say that everybody's bad, but it's just that it's the addiction. It's the influx of drugs coming in from outside, and it's not helping our communities. It's not helping anybody, but it's destroying the lives of our young people. It's having impact on them mentally and emotionally. And just like Danny said, you know, like, what's our future going to look like for the workforce? You know, like, because we are relying on our young people to take over one day, and that's what the leaders are always saying, you know. So we need to do something before it gets out of -- it is out of -- I don't think it's really out of control yet, but I think we can do something. We can do more to stop it so that it doesn't get too far that it's destroying our future generations. And not only that, but -- that and the long term, you know, we know these illegal drugs, they're made somewhere in people's warehouse. Wherever it came from, we know the prescription drugs how it's made, but these illegal drugs, it's not to be consumed. But a lot of young people are consuming it. So what kind of impact it's going to have on health care in the future? So that's a thing that I'm kind of worried, like. It's going to have a major impact on health care. And these are young people that they have so much potentials. They have a whole life. The whole life -- you know, I mean, they have so many years still ahead of them and yet, you know -- like, I mean, if we don't do anything now, it's going to be too late for some. But before it gets to many of our young people -- because the crack cocaine is the one that's more readily available in small communities, and they're cheap -- we know they're cheaply made, and they're easy and cheap to buy. Even weeds are also laced. We know that, you know. And so if you buy off a dealer, what I heard is a lot of those are laced with fentanyl and other strong chemicals. So that's why a lot of our young people are addicted to it. This is what we heard from people who are trying to educate our young people, you know, like to discourage them. So

I think for me what I do like, you know, what I see here, and I know that it's in the business plan of how they're going to do it, how -- but I think more education, more awareness needs to be done, and because with the justice system it also needs to be done in jail as well because the repeat offenders, you know, like, we need to do something more. But I just -- it's more of a comment that I think that we should start right from JK. For me, that's what I -- you know, I don't know how my colleagues feel. But I know that it needs to be start -- we need to get to the young people before it gets out of control and destroy our communities and destroy the lives of our young people who are going to take over in the future, you know, because the Baby Boomers are -- a lot of them retired. Generation X is next, and Millennia. So it's the Millennia that we have to worry about and then the other -- and then JK, young people in JK so we need to do -- we need to do more. And I like what I see in here that I know the department -- they have a plan in place. So I just want to say thank you. So it's just more of a comment. Thank you

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you for your comments. I'm going to go on to the Member from Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I too would like to echo the comments of my colleagues. In my community, my region, we've been experiencing a lot of drug activity. It's overtaken the place of the marijuana trade. There's more people that we don't even know that are in our communities. They're taking advantage of the vulnerable people and taking over their houses. For instance, we have a paraplegic young guy in our community and he's staying in a housing unit, and some of these guys come from Edmonton or down south and they know this guy already because everybody knows him from down south, I guess, and that's where they set up shop. And there's times that this individual, he's scared to go to the authorities. So the only place he can go is his grandmother's house and just try to get some sleep, and he leaves those guys at his unit. And there's a lot of people scared to intervene. The RCMP, the community's losing confidence in the RCMP because the RCMP are feeling exhausted because they feel that they're taking on all this responsibilities. It was manageable before all these hard drugs came in, but now it's unmanageable. They don't have the resources to do it. They're taking on the roles of family counselling and all these other roles. Because when an individual is addicted to these hard drugs, it doesn't affect only that person. It affects the family. It affects the community. And it also takes a toll on the resource people within the community, the

RCMP, the health centre. Every department in the government is affected by one person's use.

When we went on our social development tour in Aklavik and Inuvik, we had a meeting with the RCMP and the sergeant there stated that, you know, the only way that we can combat this drug -- the drug trade in the NWT is to get these people that are addicted, get them some help so the dealers don't have any customers. And I've always stated that it's just not the individual that needs to get these counselling services, it has to be the whole family. Like if you send one person -- if you send the individual out, then he goes out for extended period of time and he comes back and his family wouldn't know how to deal with him. So if we're going to take this approach of trying to heal our people, we have to look at healing the whole family right down to the children.

The RCMP in Inuvik stated that if they had a drug task force that dealt with drugs only, but it's a big trade. It's all over. And I don't know if just one drug task force can take on this responsibility. It would be a 24/7 job there. But he said if that force was initiated, then maybe that the other RCMPs can concentrate on other -- their other responsibilities of protecting the communities.

Just before Christmas in my hometown of Fort McPherson, we had five deaths in less than two weeks. I know there was -- and I believe four of them was drug related, and one was unknown. It wasn't revealed. But I remember sitting with the chief at the time and the next thing she got a phone call, so she had to go out on the porch to take it. She called me and said we have to go -- we have to go inform another person and while we're just dealing with one, the community was gathered at the community hall because we just lost a young person. Then we had to go to another family and tell them that, you know, they found their son dead, overdosed. So that got pretty hard on the leaders. It affects everybody. It affects the family. It affects the individual, the community. And the support is there, but it does have an impact. And I like what's going on within this budget but I look at the gun and gang strategy, it's no longer in existence. I don't know what we can do as a government to combat this awful disease that everybody is enduring.

We have really intelligent young people within -- I have to speak for my community alone. I know there's a lot of young educated individuals within the community. This drug does not discriminate against anybody. These young individuals, they're really educated. They were going to colleges and some of them come back, and they're -- they have nothing. They

have to give their children to their parents because they're hooked on this drug. And today's -- I know some of them are related, directly related to me. My sister's kids. Not all of them, but I don't even know where some of them are. They could be in the community at one day, then the next day they're gone. But I hope we can look at some -- find some alternative measures where we can meet these goals of combatting drug use, gangs, and just take the pressure off the RCMP and other resource people. And I believe this government can do it. That's all I have to say. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Mahsi. Is there any -- mahsi for your comments. Is there any further comments? I'm going to go to YK Centre, Member from YK Centre, sorry about that.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For sake of time and energy, of course I won't run through all the comments highlighted earlier today by a few of the previous speakers here. But the truth be told is, you know, we talk about these challenges at Justice, and I can tell you being the Member for the downtown riding, it is stressful for many people. And so whether you live on the edge on one side of it or closer to the Ruth Inch Pool or you live on the other side towards the Salvation Army area, I mean, it just seems to be one of the most interesting catchall areas from one end to the other. And by the way, those aren't the exact descriptions of the riding. But I mean, the point being is it really captures the downtown. And many people, you know, whether they live in Northern Heights or they live in houses downtown from where the future proposed Yellowknife Sobering Centre is, or will be, I mean, people are stressed, and they're worried about response times, they're worried about fulfillment of justice mandates, people following through. I mean, the other day I was raising the issues of scooters on roads and sidewalks and, I mean, it makes me frustrated and chuckle when I see enforcement drive by and bicycles and whatnot. We don't even enforce laws now, such as those things are legal. And as a person who's had two young people -- now they're both taller than me but, you know, when they were both short legs and drove bicycles with small tires, I mean, as a parent, we want them on sidewalks. But the point I'm making is we don't even enforce all our laws and, you know, which often makes me wonder why we even keep them on the books because we're waiting for that one circumstance where we want to hit them with everything.

Mr. Chairman, you know, we see the destruction of neighbourhoods because of drugs and alcohol and drug dealers and people taking advantage of elders and seniors and the

outright frustration of the neighbours who are held hostage. You know, somebody buys, you know -- property values, you know, it's not subjective but it's subjective in the context of where you live. You live in one neighbourhood, it's -- you know, that house is worth so much and you live in another neighbourhood, and next door you have problems, it tanks. And you know, we have people who have made life investments into their community, and, you know, it's very difficult to get a response time when, you know, you're complaining about this problem or that problem, and my goodness, I would love to see that SCAN app come into force. I would love to see stronger rules on how we deal with bail reforms highlighted by the Premier. We've heard of -- I heard it many times about these challenges and I mean, like I say, I see good people in good neighbourhoods having to listen to problems and deal with problems, and their hands are tied. I mean, I don't know what the right answer is, but I can certainly say that one of them has to do with stronger enforcement measures such as, in other words, following through on showing up and charging them who are causing problem. I do not believe for a moment that more charges solves social problems, and I'm not connecting the two, although, unfortunately, the two bleed into each other every day, which is, you know, drugs, you know, lead to one problem, alcohol leads to another, you know, buyers are there, and if people weren't buying, they wouldn't be selling. So when you live in a neighbourhood that has those problems -- and no neighbourhood downtown is exempt from this. You can say you live on one street, well we don't have problems. No, they've got problems too. So I'm very supportive of any measures that can help support the rule of law. At the same token is I'm very supportive of ways of expanding -- although I should stress I know this isn't the department but, that said, expanding treatment options and providing avenues for people to find their souls again. And I often refer to them as lost souls that need support in trouble and guidance to find their way home.

The last few years, I had the pleasure of being involved in a restorative justice program. I think that that is a bang up opportunity where -- you know, where I'd like to personally see that used more, although I'm not involved in the program anymore but I mean, I can certainly see many people who've made some challenges and found themselves in circumstances and, you know, maybe on a good day, they wouldn't have been there, but on a bad day that's where they found themselves. And I can say that there are many other things about giving people opportunity and finding their way with support of others. So Mr. Chairman, I don't want to

spend too much time. I do want to stress, though, that the core of downtown is frustrated, and what it needs specifically is a larger presence. And the larger presence doesn't necessarily mean more people arrested but people to be reminded that, you know, they have to be on some reasonable behaviour. Because people live there. They have children there. Families want to do things. And when people leave apartment buildings or condos and feel threatened or unsafe, I mean, it's -- that's not a win for anyone, really. And ultimately -- so I was just talking to my colleague from Range Lake. I mean, you know there was a time where I was trying to press -- and I would certainly like to see this. I mean, I think this is a justice issue, not necessarily a health issue, but, you know, there was a time I was trying to press that we need to put social workers on the street downtown Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night talking to people, trying to give them some guidance and maybe asking, you know, somebody who's, you know, 16 years old who's saying it's 2 o'clock in the morning, what are you doing out, you know, you're up to no good, or people trying to take some level of responsibility. And it's a community problem. I'm not going to say it's just one person. Yellowknife is a big community. And I mean, I grew up in a small one, and I know what it's like being a young person and I'll say full of adventure, and though I can't talk about a few stories due to statute of limitations, but they're going to be funny one day.

But in all seriousness, Mr. Chairman, a greater presence is really -- if I had an ask specifically at this particular time, a greater presence, that we find a way to put, for example, the RCMP in the community more out of cars, talking to people, you know, whether it's telling a person in front of the Reddi Mart downtown, you know, here's an ice cream, now walk home. You know, it's 11 o'clock, you should be home. You know, somebody who's having trouble, you know, can we call someone and send you home, you know, type of thing. And like I say, a bigger physical presence would go a long way. And by no means have I -- will advocate for harsher punishment because I think some of these troubled souls in general have their own challenges and our job is to help guide them back to some stability. But to the hard crime folks, we have to find a way because it rots the community. And I'm hopeful, like I said, with the SCAN app coming down the pipe and maybe a larger presence, we can have a more positive influence on our community, which is what many of us need. And I can assure you a guy who knocked down -- knocked on doors for many years despite the sabbatical, I can tell you it has gotten worse, and our job is to make things better. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thanks to the Member from Yellowknife Centre. And we'll pass the floor over to the Member of Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh, Mr. Edjericon.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It was pretty hard sitting up there, sitting back and listening to this issue, the issue of drug addictions that impacts our communities. When I heard my colleagues speak about it, especially George, it really hits home. I know in our small communities, we feel this every day. And even as the MLA and even as a former chief, I've been to many funerals. And when you go to funerals, it's really tough on everybody, especially on the family. And, you know, I don't want to get into the specific details about what happened but I could tell you this: It's all related to the drugs that's in our communities. And I just want to echo my comments I mentioned this afternoon when I did my Member's statement that, you know, I think it's really time now that I think maybe your department could really take a look at what's been said here tonight. And what we're saying here tonight has also been echoed to you by the Circle of Aboriginal Leaders as well and -- because I talked to them as well. And I think that, you know, this issue, even though that the RCMP may have a different view about the assessments needed for this dog K-9 units that is really needed. Yes, we do have it here in Yellowknife but it's getting so bad now that it's -- I think we're getting really tired of going to the funerals now. And I agree with my colleagues that, you know, it's hitting home. And at what point -- I mean, every day I drop off my grandson at school, and he's in grade 11 and he's 16 years old, and I often remind him every day, you know, to make the right choices. And so far, you know, we've been blessed. But the thing is that my colleague over there says that drugs don't discriminate, and it's true. It doesn't -- I see in my community, it doesn't matter who you are. It impacts everybody. So I just want to just keep thinking about -- I'm going to be putting forward a motion on the K-9-unit that I would like to see in Hay River. And if the Minister and your department could really take a look at that. And I know when you go to Ottawa, you could probably talk to the RCMP and see what we could do to really lobby to get a new K-9 unit stationed in Hay River. It's a start, but right now, as it is, it's a crisis now that's here in our communities. And like I said, I could count how many funerals I have just on that issue alone, and there's too many.

And so anyways, I'm just -- I'm glad that you're hearing from my colleagues in the small communities, and it's impacting right across the North, and especially here in Yellowknife. All you got to do is just drive down the streets. And every day, we say our prayers and we give our

blessings. And I just hope that you as the Minister, I hope you're listening to what we're saying and that, you know, the issue of this K-9-unit, I think it's really needed. How we get there is -- we'll have to figure that one out. I'm hoping that you guys -- your department could take a good look at that and see what we could do, and it's obviously going to have the support of the House here on that issue. So anyways, Mr. Chairperson, that's just my comments. Mahsi.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member of Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Do we have -- do any Members have general comments? Seeing none, does committee agree to proceed to the detail contained in the tabled document?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you. Get the main man here.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Committee, we will defer the departmental summary and review of the estimates by activity summary beginning with community justice starting on page 302 with information items on page 304 and 305. Are there any questions?

There's a question there from Member from Great Slave -- sorry, Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Just getting the clock going there. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a very, very quick comment, and I actually don't even need a response to this. I just wanted to note that I was very happy to see -- I'll wait a second here.

Sorry, Mr. Chair. Actually, I have a question. Noting that the reduction to community justice committees and projects, can the Minister speak to that a little bit?

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I'd like to hand it to Mr. Bancroft.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): To the director.

MR. JAMES BANCROFT: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Premier. The reduction there of \$238,000 for grants and contributions is related to the Indigenous justice program. It was the second year of the program. The first year had a higher level of funding to get the program started. It's just a mid agreement reduction. The funding is continuing at a level of \$315,000 compared to its original first year level of \$504,000. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Okay, thank you. And this is, just to be clear, not a reduction in service, it's just the program needed a bit of extra money to be launched?

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. That's correct. Often there's work that needs to be done to get a program going and so the agreements with the federal government accounted for that, and then the ongoing funding is more reflective of the ongoing needs. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, I did want to just note that I was pleased to see an increase between the main estimates and revised estimates for the men's healing program noted and that that increase has been carried over. So I don't really have a question about that. I just wanted to state that I'm happy to see that. I do think that's an important program and clearly tied to some of the goals of this Assembly. And so that's all my comments on this page. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Any further questions? Yes, I have the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Is this where we would find the funding for the community safety officer program in Fort Liard? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, I believe so.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So what's the status of that? Because I know that, like, when coming into this Assembly as well, I was kind of unclear if there was a pause because of COVID or because of evac or all the other unmitigated disasters that had befallen the 19th Assembly. So where are we at with the community safety officer pilot? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And there were -- it took time to ramp up the program. There was a requirement to find people, to train people, and that's not always a quick task. And so it didn't move as quickly as we would have hoped. Maybe the deputy minister has more information on that. I can hand it to her, maybe not, but we'll try. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. CHARLENE DOOLITTLE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, we had a pilot program that we started with Fort Liard. We put out an expression of interest, and they were the successful community for a pilot project. It's been extended to March 31st, 2026, due to the delay the Premier was speaking about. We do have a program evaluation that will occur at the end of the term. Extending it gives us more time to collect more data due to that start that often takes time in pilot projects.

We have also received some funding from Public Safety Canada under the FNIPP program which gives us a better cost share ratio. So they have provided us with some funding as well for this program, which is good news. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The money from Public Safety Canada, is that funding that could be expanded, or are they just funding the pilot, or is this a larger -- or is this a broader initiative that they are providing financing for around community safety officer programs? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. That funding is for the extension of the program. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. So what's the total expenditure of the program? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. The budget is \$303,000 per year. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Member to Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: And how many officers does that fund -- or positions, I guess, in the community? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. There are two community safety officers. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. The Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The program evaluation, what does that entail? Are they engaging -- will it engage with members of the community as well to get feedback from them in addition to -- I'll just leave it open ended. Like, what will it evaluate? How will that -- what's the methodology around the evaluation? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So they will be looking at the community partnerships and the activities that were undertaken, the number of calls for support, as well as the impact on the RCMP calls for support, and prisoner counts. So I don't have the exact details. I don't have the evaluation framework here, but I would imagine that when you look at things like community partnerships and activities, there's interviews with other groups in the community and things like that. But once that evaluation framework is finalized, we can share that. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. Thank you to the Premier. This is a really great program, I just wanted to say, and I think it should be -- I mean, hopefully, the evaluation comes back that it's cost effective and is reducing calls and all the things we want it to do. I know that several years ago now the City of Yellowknife had proposed a similar program. I think it was called the community safety officer program to the government of the day. And there was a concern around funding. I think the conversation was, if we can find the money, then we'll support it.

Is there -- could this -- if Yellowknife or a larger centre was interested in a program like this, would there be support from the department now? Because I appreciate that this is a pilot, but I think this is a -- there's a need for this in just about every community. And it would be interesting to see how it would develop in a larger centre, especially given my colleague

from Yellowknife Centre spoke about, like, the need for community policing and getting out of the car and on the street and talking to people, and CSOs seem like a good fit for that model. So is there the potential that this could work in Yellowknife or Hay River or a larger centre? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go over to the Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I believe there's potential that it could work in a lot of places, but it's the funding issue that is, I would say, the holdup right now. This is federally funded. And when I last met with the Minister of public safety -- or I guess the previous time -- this was discussed, and we did talk about the success of this program understanding there isn't an evaluation yet. And there was interest, and it does appear that the federal government is interested in this. And so we hope that this program, the evaluation will show that it is successful, and then we can move into other communities.

With the Department of Justice, most of the money is allocated to the courts and to the RCMP and to corrections and so anything additional we do, it comes through federal funding for the most part. So that's what it's contingent upon. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. And, yeah, I assume that was the answer but if you need support, please bring it to the standing committee. I'm sure we'll write you a letter.

Switching gears, the Protection against Family Violence Act is scheduled to be updated. Could the Minister speak to what changes are being contemplated by the department? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. If you could just give me one moment while I turn to that page, thanks.

Thank you. So I don't have a lot of detail on that, but one of the issues that has been identified is who is included in that definition under the Act. And so that's one area that we're looking at. And the other, we're also looking at other amendments. But I can get back to the Members with more information on that specific legislative initiative. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. And I appreciate that we will -- I mean, it's legislation, it's going to be proposed, we will see it. I just was curious about what is being contemplated because it's not clear in the list of legislative proposals that are currently out.

Well, yeah no, I think I'm good. Thank you. This has been -- again, I think this is -- this is good detail in here. There's good programming and support for the men's healing program. I'm glad to see the funding increased and continued to maintain that level. It was something that we looked at very closely in the 18th Assembly, and I'm glad to see it continue here. So thank you, Mr. Chair. Nothing further.

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

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is on the descriptions of cost shared agreements. To a large degree, we're dependent on our federal counterpart to assist with resources and if there's such a high change in our society for increased services and in justice, rehabilitation, counselling, those types of related services, is it the department's wishes or are they going to seek further agreements to cover some of the shortfalls that we're experiencing in the area of justice and rehabilitation? Are we going back to the federal government for more money? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are always going to the federal government. The Department of Justice hustles to find agreements, to find pots of money that they can access. And so I wouldn't say we're going back to them, but there is a constant dialogue and there's always -- not always new agreements but there are a number of agreements. And we do give our two cents to the feds about what we would like to see and what direction we would like to see their agreements go in if it's not one that works for the territory. And as always, I -- when I speak to the federal Ministers, I say we need ensure that no matter what we're doing, it needs to -- the feds need to consider the Northwest Territories and our unique context relative to the southern provinces when they're designing programs and allocating funding for programs as well because the per capita allocations don't work for us. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to go back to the Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm satisfied with that reply. Mahsi.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Here, gun and gang strategies, okay, 2022-2023, there's nothing allocated for this fiscal year. It's not in the budget. So I just want to ask the Minister why it's not -- because we know -- we have a lot of issues in small communities, and then I'm sure there's a lot of community, you know, Indigenous government and other organizations, they use this money for -- you know, to help and work with the young people. So it's more of awareness and education program, part of healing. So I just wanted to know why it's not part of this budget this fiscal year.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Again, this is another federal program and so we had an agreement with the federal government to receive funding through the Guns and Gang Strategy. The federal government discontinued that strategy but we have recently confirmed that that money is being reprofiled to the same end, but in a different program and so we are awaiting details on that. But we hope to be getting into discussions and signing it as soon as possible. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Yeah, that's good. Thank you. That's what I wanted to hear. And then what I see here, it's good. You know, there's more money allocated to some of the programs, like men's healing, which is greatly needed, and it's helping a lot of community members in small communities. So I know it's being used well. Even the Victim Assistance Program, it's really helping a lot of communities because I know that we see things happening because of these programs. So I'm glad there is money, you know, there is increase in that budget for this fiscal year. So that's all. It's more of a comment. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Any other Members want to make a comment? General comments? Okay, no further questions.

Please turn to page 303, Justice, community justice, operations expenditure summary, 2024-2025 Main Estimates, \$6,659,000. Does the committee agree? Thank you.

I'll read this out again.

Justice committee, justice operations expenditure summary, 2024-2025, Main Estimates, \$6,759,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON ((Mr. Edjericon)): Thank you. The Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, please rise and report progress.

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

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress.

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 93-20(1) and would like to report progress with a one. And Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole to be concurred with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Do I have a seconder? Member from Mackenzie Delta. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? Unanimous.

---Carried

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

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Thursday, May 30th, 2024, at 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions

5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Replies to the Budget Address, Day 5 of 7
7. Acknowledgements
8. Oral Questions
9. Written Questions
10. Returns to Written Questions
11. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
12. Petitions
13. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
14. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
15. Tabling of Documents
16. Notices of Motion
17. Motions
 - Motion 27-20(1): Reappointment of Human Rights Commission Members
18. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
19. First Reading of Bills
20. Second Reading of Bills
21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Minister's Statement 4-20(1): 2023 Wildfire Season Review and Planning for the 2024 Season
 - Minister's Statement 5-20(1): Emergency Management Preparation
 - Minister's Statement 17-20(1): Reaching Average \$10 a Day Child Care in the NWT
 - Minister's Statement 24-20(1): Health Human Resources Recruitment and Retention
 - Tabled Document 93-20(1): 2024-2025 Main Estimates
22. Report of the Committee of the Whole
23. Third Reading of Bills
24. Orders of the Day

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Thursday, May 30th, 2024, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 7:59 p.m.

