



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
**LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY**

1st Session

Day 39

20th Assembly

HANSARD

Thursday, February 6, 2025

Pages 1573 - 1614

The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Thursday, February 6, 2025****Members Present**

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

The House met at 1:31 p.m.

Prayer or Reflection

---Prayer or reflection

SPEAKER (HON. SHANE THOMPSON): I'd like to thank Theresa Echinelle for opening prayer and guiding words. We have a full audience today. I don't understand why; I wonder what excitement is happening today. Oh, right, item number 2, Budget Address. Minister of Finance.

Budget Address

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I am delivering the second budget of the 20th Assembly at a time of significant economic and political uncertainty - not only in the Northwest Territories but across Canada and the world - made more perilous by the potential implementation of import tariffs by the United States. The Government of the Northwest Territories is a small player on this very large stage, but we can provide stability within the territory and must continue to maintain our readiness for whatever challenges and uncertainties may arise.

Events like these tariffs are why we introduced fiscal sustainability in the first place, but they also demonstrate why we are applying it in a strategic fashion. We are not making cuts for the sake of cuts; rather, we are using the budget we have wisely and being cautious with reductions so we can meet uncertainty with confidence while remaining committed to delivering on the priority goals set by this Assembly.

Budget 2025 provides resources to fund the actions, activities, and programs that move us toward these goals and the priorities set by this Assembly while ensuring we live within our means. We are focused on maximizing efficiency and innovation to make the most of existing resources, rather than simply creating new budget line items.

Today, I will outline some of the financial resources dedicated to our continued work in

achieving the goals of the mandate, as well as to other programs and services on which communities and residents depend. To start, I will provide an update on the fiscal challenges we face.

Mr. Speaker, 2024-2025 was yet another challenging year for many communities and residents across the Northwest Territories. While residents in the south were recovering from the 2023 wildfires and evacuations, residents in the Beaufort Delta were experiencing record-setting fall and winter snowfalls. This snow had a heavy impact on roads and raised the costs to maintain regional access and supply chains. And, by the spring, we faced a different weather effect in the form of extreme low water that resulted in a crisis for communities in the Sahtu with the first ever complete cancellation of a barge season since Marine Transportation Services or its predecessors began to conduct barge resupply. We also had yet another difficult wildfire season as residents of Fort Good Hope were evacuated. Low water on the Snare hydro system raised costs as Northwest Territories Power Corporation was forced to burn diesel and the GNWT stepped in to maintain pricing stability for ratepayers on the Snare system. Ratepayers across the Northwest Territories benefit from that action through the Territorial Power Support Program that subsidizes rates to those in Yellowknife. Last, but not least, health care needs and costs continue to escalate.

As we near the end of this fiscal year, we are projecting expenses to be \$197 million higher and revenues \$27 million less than budgeted and have revised the projected 2024-2025 operating surplus to \$69 million.

As a result, we are not yet within reach of the targets set in our fiscal strategy of Restoring Balance. This strategy was never meant to prevent prompt responses during extraordinary challenges or demand cuts for the sake of achieving a reduction target. Restoring Balance is part of shifting the culture of how we deliver programs and services to ensure that we maximize the value from the budget available. We remain committed to Restoring Balance and we are grateful to see support for evidence-

based changes. For example, using the resources proposed in Budget 2025, our public service will continue over the coming year to deliver efficiency improvements through the Health System Sustainability Unit, through fleet management, and our lease envelope.

The proposed 2025-2026 Budget forecasts revenues to increase two per cent from 2024-2025 to almost \$2.7 billion, with Territorial Formula Financing driving total revenue growth. Total operating expenditures are increasing 6.5 per cent to almost \$2.5 billion. We are proposing \$9.1 million in reductions across all departments. The resulting \$145 million in net new spending includes \$27 million in programs that are federally funded and \$108 million for collective bargaining increases for compensation and benefits. Inflationary and increased program demand costs were kept to less than \$27 million. And the remaining \$10-million increase to the expenditures for discretionary spending is an increase of only 0.5 per cent compared to last year's budget.

The resulting operating surplus of \$170 million would generate enough of a cash operating surplus to fund all of 2025-2026 capital investments. Despite this, at the end of the next fiscal year total debt is projected to be \$1.772 billion, which is \$31 million higher than the current 2024-2025 estimate. Short-term borrowing is projected to increase \$50 million while long-term borrowing is expected to decrease \$19 million. This projection puts us close enough to the federal borrowing limit and we have requested, and expect to receive, a borrowing increase from Canada to give us the flexibility to respond to any future unforeseen fiscal pressures.

[Translation] -- which have succeeded themselves. Nevertheless, we do not propose to increase the fiscal capacity by introducing new taxes apart from the land taxes which are increasing with an inflation. The resident salaried residents are confronted with the same financial pressures as the government, and giving grants for energy costs to then see these advances reduced by tax increases would be counterproductive. We would prefer that the -- we would prosper and contribute to the taxes by having greater income rather than by subsidizing increased tax rates. [Translation Ends]

Mr. Speaker, the Northwest Territories is now on the eve of the closing of one of the diamond mines that have been the backbone of our private sector economy for over 25 years.

And for the third consecutive year, overall economic activity is expected to decline in 2025. However, business investment remains a

key driver of growth. While mineral exploration and appraisal spending in 2024 is projected to be lower compared to 2023, that year defied expectations, reaching a 15-year high.

Population continues slow but positive growth and the Northwest Territories economy continues to have high employment and some of the highest wages and salaries in the country. Interest rates are coming down and subdued inflation should support robust retail and wholesale trade activity. The construction industry contributed to growth in the goods sector and our service sector, the largest in Canada on a per capita basis, saw growth in professional and technical services and a rebound in tourism-related areas, while trapping, film, and commercial fishing are also on the rise.

The public sector remains a significant part of our economy, bringing both advantages and challenges. It offers stability and strong employment growth, especially important given the cyclical nature of the mineral industry. This stability is further bolstered by Indigenous governments, where there has been a growth of nearly 200 public administration jobs since 2023. However, the public sector alone does not drive the economic diversity or entrepreneurship that leads to stronger productivity and long-term growth.

Acknowledging the economic and fiscal challenges we face does not change the GNWT's obligation to deliver on the priorities set by this Assembly. These priorities reflect the needs and aspirations of Northwest Territories residents for long-term health and prosperity. Being realistic about how we fund the work of government does not diminish their importance. However, it requires us to assess how we allocate budgets, strengthen collaboration across departments, and ensure public servants have the support they need to fully contribute toward these goals.

Housing NWT remains the main conduit to address the Assembly's priority to increase the suitability, accessibility and affordability of housing. Housing NWT receives funding from a variety of sources, including \$81.3 million proposed in this budget; an increase of \$5 million over last year. With this investment, Housing NWT will continue to provide social and market housing programs, including subsidized rental and homeownership programs and unsubsidized rental housing in rural and remote communities.

A key development in 2025 will be the completion of Housing NWT's comprehensive Territorial Housing Needs Assessment that incorporates community and regional

perspectives on the varying housing needs across the territory. As we heard from participants at the recent NWT Housing Forum Symposium, a lack of data on housing needs hampers access to available funding sources. The Territorial Housing Needs Assessment will fill this gap and provide a platform for the development of a plan to provide stable, attainable, and affordable homes across the housing spectrum. We will ensure that this assessment is shared with all levels of government so that we maximize opportunities for its success. To supplement this work, Housing NWT is also developing a three-year investment plan for the replacement and repair of its existing houses.

Housing is a priority actioned across many departments. In this budget, we propose adding \$3.7 million, including \$500,000 in federal funding, for a strategic approach to reducing homelessness in Yellowknife, along with \$809,000 for the Transitional Housing Addictions Recovery Program.

We continue to deliver on the mandate priority to provide shelter for vulnerable residents and address the effects of trauma in a culturally appropriate way. Building on the work being delivered this year, we propose to add \$264,000 for the Yellowknife Shelter and Sobering Centre bringing total funding to \$6.2 million for 34 positions.

Care homes are also facing cost pressures and an additional \$136,000 is proposed for increased costs at the Avens Long Term Care and \$56,000 to fully fund adult supported living at the Charlotte Vehus Home and the Billy Moore Group Home, with the capacity to care for up to 13 clients in the Beaufort Delta.

Creating opportunities for new homes often means ensuring access to land, whether through the remediation and clearing of old, unused buildings or through new allocations. The Department of Environment and Climate Change has prioritized land applications for housing and to date has received 204 applications, of which 121 are in their final stages of processing and 27 parcels have been issued.

The challenges to our narrowly focused private economy are well known: the North faces a significant deficit in core public infrastructure compared to the rest of Canada, especially in transportation and energy corridors. That lack exacerbates the reality of being more remote by making delivery and access to goods and services in our communities more expensive. Our labour market is tight, and housing is in short supply. And finally, the regulatory spaces that control new entrants to exploration and

mining remains a shared responsibility with the federal government, which makes efforts at modification, including streamlining rules, more challenging.

We are taking steps to address these structural issues so that we strengthen the territory's economic foundation and encourage continued growth in sectors that significantly influence the economic health of communities.

[Translation] The Mackenzie River highway in its environmental assessment and to update its profitability analysis so that we'll be able to move forward with this project which will establish a connection with the Sahtu and will allow to create road access (audio) centre of the Canadian arctic. We also propose to use the budget for 2025 to continue the exchanges and analysis concerning the construction of an all season road crossing the geological slave province rich in minerals in order to obtain the technical support and community support to move on to environmental assessment. [Translation Ends]

In telecommunications, we are including \$1.1 million to extend the Mackenzie Valley Fibre Link to the Arctic Coast by connecting Tuktoyaktuk.

The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs works closely with community governments to ensure flexibility in federal infrastructure funding and has helped ensure that all of the \$117 million dedicated to local governments from the federal Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program was allocated to projects focused on community roads, solid waste projects and cultural spaces.

In 2025-2026, we will implement an action plan in furtherance of the memorandum of understanding on economic corridors signed with the Government of Alberta to support collaboration on the enhancement of critical infrastructure and improve efficiency of transportation networks. We will also be exploring similar agreements with other jurisdictions.

Our energy system has not evolved significantly over many successive governments leaving energy infrastructure aging and vulnerable to breaking down and our residents facing volatile costs. With this year's budget, we will advance better energy connectivity between our communities to increase the reliability and sustainability of power. We will work to advance a Fort Providence transmission line and will be undertaking the design of a Whati transmission line.

We will also advance work to improve our capacity and ability to generate power across the Northwest Territories. We will use this year's budget to support partners on the Taltson expansion project to expand the knowledge of legacy impacts and advance consideration of establishing a business entity for the project. We will use this year's budget to support multiple departments in the delivery of the renewed energy strategy and examine alternative means of accessing more reliable and affordable energy sources appropriate to each community.

Upgrading our aging energy systems will take time. While that work continues, the government is proposing a \$12-million subsidy to offset high power costs, limiting the required 24.8 per cent energy increase for ratepayers in 2025 down to a more manageable 15 per cent increase overall and that residential ratepayers who qualify for the Territorial Power Subsidy Program may face a 9 per cent rate increase. Final rates will be determined by the Public Utilities Board through the general rate application process.

We are helping to reduce labour shortages in trades through our apprenticeship programs and Housing NWT scholarships. The Department of Infrastructure dedicates \$1.6 million of its proposed budget to hire and train apprentices and works with Procurement and Shared Services within the Department of Finance to make certain that training and targets for apprenticeship requirements are included in all design-build project evaluations.

Our Crown agencies play a major role in supporting private sector employment. For example, Housing NWT awards over 90 per cent of its annual contracting opportunities to local businesses. These contracts range from minor repairs and maintenance to large construction projects. And for the coming year, Housing NWT, working with Local Housing Organizations, plans to increase its in-house apprenticeship opportunities to 15 and will continue to support apprenticeship work assignments through new construction contracts.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment plays a supporting role for employment opportunities and increasing participation in trades, particularly in small communities. The department is making a tangible impact through Labour Market Transfer Agreements by supporting 156 residents, 63 employers, and 11 projects. The Small Community Employment Support program has contributed to the creation of 643 jobs, directly benefiting small communities across the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, many Northerners want to stay in their communities for work. That is why this budget retains \$4-million with the Small Community Employment Program so that small communities, plus regional centres with employment rates less than 50 per cent, remain eligible for this funding that supports the creation of new jobs in the communities that need them most.

This budget proposes \$10.5 million to make child care more affordable, helping parents participate more fully in the formal labour force. The Government of the Northwest Territories will continue to advocate to the federal government to increase compensation levels of early child care staff to align with education assistants in the K-12 system.

Last fiscal year, we concluded collective bargaining with several unions across the public service. The GNWT delivers services across a vast territory of 33 communities, which does not provide for economies of scale and results in situations where no private market actors provide access to necessities such as fuel or barge supplies. In these situations, the public service fills these needs in addition to providing schooling, health care, safe highways and airports, economic development supports and land management.

We watched closely as labour disruptions impacted services across Canada. Concluding our collective agreements in a manner that avoided labour strife and maintained our competitive position as an employer for the delivery of essential goods and services was an important achievement for the GNWT, and this year's proposed budget incorporates those changes to all salaries and benefits.

We also propose to better support timely medical travel assistance for GNWT employees and their immediate families with \$7.4 million, which includes the adding one benefit officer in Inuvik and another in Norman Wells to improve for processing times.

We are proposing \$496,000 to encourage more exploration in the non-renewable sector. This includes \$275,000 to expand research about critical minerals in the Selwyn Basin and Slave Geological Province. This work is mostly offset with federal funding and involves collaboration between the Northwest Territories geological survey office and university and industry partners. Also included is \$167,000 for the Pan-Territorial Resource Investment Marketing Initiative, which is a federal and all territories joint campaign to market the territories as destinations for business and investment opportunities in the mining sector.

We are continuing to improve regulations to support the economy with an additional \$54,000 in this budget to complete the Mineral Resources Act regulations. As well this year, the Department of Environment and Climate Change will use its proposed budget to advance targeted amendments to the Waters Regulations to improve interpretation and add consistency and clarity to the regulatory regime for our mineral resource sector.

We will be implementing the Fire Prevention Act regulations that adopt the 2020 National Fire Code and adds certainty to construction projects. In addition, we will continue multidepartment work towards a Building Standards Framework for introduction during the life of this government.

Support for northern business is always a priority for the GNWT and sector-specific efforts encourage investment and create growth in communities of every size.

For instance, Housing NWT supports increasing productivity in the construction and property management sectors through early uptake of innovative approaches such as wood pellet heat plants, integration of mass-timber structural building systems, and hybrid modular construction approaches in its multi-unit residential projects. These approaches provide baseline information that the private sector can use to grow their businesses.

[Translation] So traditional hunting sector is recovering from this difficult period. We propose to maintain the financial support granted to the program for the -- that helped hunters and trappers cover their expenses. This budget will allow to continue the program -- or the authentic fur program for the Mackenzie Valley which offers a unique one stop shop for sales and international options which actually commercialize fur, protects hunters against sudden lowering of prices, give them payments when the fur is sold at a higher rate and compensates for the variations in costs, for example, the costs and commissions. [Translation Ends]

In this Budget, we are proposing to add \$600,000 to the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment for additional economic diversification initiatives. This includes increasing funding for the Northwest Territories Film Strategy from \$500,000 to \$1 million to help showcase the territory's spectacular settings.

The Tourism 2025 strategy is in its final year, and Budget 2025 proposes to increase its funding as planned by \$100,000 to continue with the recovery roadmap that was released in

2021. This increase will support the Community Tourism Infrastructure Contribution Program, which helps other governments and non-government organizations enhance tourism facilities. Through this program we have already invested \$1.4 million to support 41 projects across the territory.

Remediation of old mines and oil and gas wells may prove to be a stable source of local employment in future years. Federal funding for next year's budget will permit spending of \$696,000 for ongoing pre-remediation work at several mine sites, including public consultation, to produce finalized remediation plans.

Mr. Speaker, meeting Northwest Territories residents' health care needs, while trying to make progress on our Restoring Balance targets, is our main fiscal challenge. While the Healthcare System Sustainability Unit does deeper analysis of how essential programs and services are delivered, we are funding the territorial health and social services system with a focus on supporting changes that address the dual priorities that residents receive the highest quality access to care and programs that are available to address the effects of trauma. We are reforming primary health care with the development of an integrated primary care framework, including performance benchmarks that provide the data for further evidence-based improvements. We maintain a focus on prevention through education and awareness efforts about sexually transmitted and blood borne infections and testing, immunizations, injury prevention, elder abuse and family violence, mental health, and illicit drugs. To improve experiences for residents who need to travel for care, we are updating medical travel policies and processes. Work is ongoing to renew the health care system human resources plan to improve efforts to recruit and retain professional staff.

Addressing the effects of trauma is not a quick fix and we are continuing to make a variety of supports available for residents with mental health and addictions needs including walk-in and same-day access for community counselling with online support options, and 24/7 supports through 811 and other helplines. We also provide funding to Indigenous governments and communities to support culturally-based and safe healing options. We use biannual service user surveys to measure effectiveness of the services provided and to support the ongoing review of policies and program design to ensure alignment with person-centered, trauma informed and culturally safe care.

For this year's budget, we are proposing a further \$71.5 million in measures to address health care and social services accessibility.

Our health and social services system relies on a strong network of staff and health care professionals. We are proposing several increases to support staff and health care professionals across the territory.

We are making progress addressing hospital overcapacity issues and are proposing \$5.6 million for 26 full-time equivalent positions for physicians, nurses, and coordinators, including 19 positions plus four relief positions for Stanton Territorial Hospital's emergency, intensive care, and medicine units and three full-time nurses and support for a relief position at the Inuvik Regional Hospital. We are also asking for \$511,000 for two nurses in Yellowknife and one nurse in Fort Smith to the Corrections Health Services roster. In addition, we are proposing \$13.7 million to cover shortfalls in physician services.

As requested, and approved during last year's budget negotiations, Budget 2025 also dedicates \$331,000 in proposed spending to maintain two positions under the midwifery program to support two communities that do not have access to midwife services.

Providing care for patients with cancer is a partnership with Alberta Health Services and with their support, the Health and Social Services Authorities are working to bring treatment closer to home. To support this effort, the budget includes \$869,000 to provide the hematology and medical oncology units with enough resources for two oncologists and two registered nurses.

We also propose \$446,000 to add three positions to the Office of the Public Guardian to better support people who lack the ability to make their own decisions because of long-term health and social conditions like dementia, brain injury, or developmental disabilities.

We need our staff to be safe in their workplaces. The correlation between increased drug use and rising violent incidents within health and social services settings increases the demand for de-escalation training for staff. We propose an additional \$620,000 to fund specialized occupational health and safety positions.

Frontline health and social services cannot operate effectively without properly resourced administration. We are seeking to right-size the administrative arm of the health and social services system with proposals to augment resources for recruitment, prevention

programs, and actions to reduce structural deficits along with other cost drivers.

Included in the additional funding to improve administrative capacity in the health care system is funding to assist continuous recruitment of health and social services professionals. For example, funding has not kept pace with the expenses for moving new staff and professionals to the territory, making it hard to get staff and professionals to the communities where they are needed. We propose to help resolve this issue in this budget with \$6 million to fund relocation costs more realistically. We are also proposing \$5.4 million to ensure accommodations for locums.

Further, the Office of Medical Affairs and Credentialing, which is responsible for recruitment, retention, contract administration, credentialing and labour relations for resident and locum physicians, is facing its own staffing shortage and we are proposing to remedy this with \$651,000 in this budget.

The Healthcare System Sustainability Unit cannot effectively achieve its goals of evidence-based recommendations without proper data from the health and social services system. And Budget 2025 adds \$513,000 for records and information management to fund three positions.

Similarly, catching up on the health and social services deficits means properly funding budgets to address external cost drivers such as tighter real estate markets, changing lease terms, building maintenance requirements, and increases in insurance. Budget 2025 includes a proposal to add \$1.9 million to offset the lease cost shortfalls projected for the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority and the Tlichq Community Services Agency; and, \$613,000 for increased payments to the Boreal Health Partnership for services at the Stanton Territorial Hospital.

Mitigating the spread of disease helps lower the demand for health services. We are proposing an additional \$673,000 to fund four positions to operate infection prevention and control programs across the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority.

The need for diagnostic tools to help practitioners prescribe appropriate therapies for sleep apnea is becoming increasingly important as the population ages and obesity rates rise. We are proposing \$412,000 for the sleep studies program.

We are working diligently to honour the principle of keeping children with their families and in their communities but, when families are in crisis, intervention is still necessary, and the

volume of cases continues to rise. We are proposing to ensure increasing costs for in-territory child and family supports are addressed with an additional \$3.1 million to meet the need for more foster placements and adequate financial and other caregiver support. This budget also proposes an additional \$240,000 for respite services for families in the territory.

We are proposing an additional \$1.1 million for adult southern placements so these residents can receive the required specialized care that is unavailable within the territory. These range from short-term stays for treatment or transitional programs for mental health or behavioural needs to long-term treatments for lifelong disabilities.

We also propose to address the shortfall of \$6.2 million in supplies used in the delivery of healthcare, which includes the Respiratory Syncytial Virus vaccine to protect infants, children and those with chronic lung disease, as well as to support Covid-19 vaccine costs. These proposed funds also cover cost pressures for chemotherapy drugs, caused by an increased number of patients, the cost of treatments, and the growing types of treatments available and being deployed.

Right-sizing health and social services budgets to be more reflective of costs will be ongoing work during the life of this government while we continue to gather data to support immediate improvements in health care delivery that hopefully also lower costs.

Mr. Speaker, we spend over \$200 million annually on programs and services that support safety for residents and communities either directly, such as for law enforcement, or indirectly, by providing operating infrastructure grants to communities to help them with their funding needs to provide municipal services. We also work to mitigate safety risks. For example, we updated the GNWT Emergency Plan last year and we are using this to help strengthen communities' abilities to deal with emergencies. We are advancing our efforts to remove historic hazardous waste and are on track to remove it from half of all communities by 2028.

Mr. Speaker, we are proposing to advance the priority to support safety for residents and communities with an additional \$18.3 million, partially offset with \$7.1 million in federal support, to help address cost pressures for communities, winter road construction, mitigate natural disaster risks and enhance public safety.

We are proposing to support the ability of communities to deliver on their spending responsibilities with \$6.3 million to address municipal funding needs for operations, maintenance, water and waste programs. Continuing with last year's commitments, the Community Access Program remains available for governments to obtain infrastructure funding for access roads, trails and docks with a proposed \$1.5 million.

This budget sets aside a proposed \$4.2 million for the Department of Infrastructure to enhance its ability to cope with higher costs, including winter road construction and maintenance costs.

Risk mitigation continues to play an important role in all our programs but is particularly key in programs to keep communities safe. With \$2.7 million in federal support, we are proposing \$2.9 million to mitigate natural disaster risks. This proposed funding includes \$2.1 million for the FireSmart program, \$571,000 for wildfire suppression equipment and monitoring, and \$210,000 for the Hunter and Trapper Disaster Compensation program as a response to flooding.

Assessing risk starts with gathering evidence. Partnering with the federal government permits the use of \$1.4 million in federal funds for research and monitoring activities, including \$796,000 in Integrated Climate Resilience for Coastal Communities and \$460,000 to participate and contribute to the national forest inventory.

Budget 2025 contains an additional \$2.9 million, including \$2.4 million in federal funding, for public safety measures delivered primarily through the Department of Justice. The additional funds include \$824,000 for the integration of services, \$800,000 to support the federal Gun and Gang Violence Action Fund, \$499,000 to further enhance support for the Indigenous Justice Program, and \$251,000 for implementing the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and enhance victim services with independent legal advice.

We are also proposing another \$372,000 in funding for the RCMP G-Division Emergency Response Team with an additional two constables.

Mr. Speaker, we accomplished a lot in the first year of this Assembly despite some real challenges. However, we will end this fiscal year embroiled in economic disruption and uncertainty caused by potential US tariffs and an unpredictable political landscape. As of today, we do not yet know if tariffs will be in place; or, whether government support will be

available to maintain domestic supply chains or cost stability. But we will stand united with all of Canada.

The next few years are likely to bring continued challenges and disruptions, whether geopolitical, climate-related, or otherwise. That is why we must continue pressing forward on our priorities to build a stronger future - one that maintains fiscal stability while ensuring we have the capacity to react and respond to an emerging crisis.

The fiscal strategy outlined in Restoring Balance is a work in progress, designed to guide our financial course over the full four-year term. Fiscal sustainability is fundamental to good governance, ensuring that as a government, we have the ability to support communities and residents through times of turbulence. Budget 2025 reflects our ongoing commitment to these principles.

Business plans, which outline how allocated budgets will be used, are also ongoing works in progress. They reflect the type of planning needed to achieve our priorities and strengthen our future. Budget 2025 is designed to fund these business plans and all of our ongoing programs and services in a realistic manner, incorporating evidence-based decision-making and advancing the priorities and mandate of this Assembly. Our goal is to support residents in how they want to live, work, and grow.

We have continued to demonstrate that, as a government and as a territory, we can face challenges with resilience, creativity, and determination. At the same time, we remain focused on the long term, ensuring that we continue to build a Northwest Territories that is healthy, prosperous, and safe.

I want to thank the Members of the Legislative Assembly for their work in shaping the 2025-2026 Budget. I look forward to working collaboratively on our shared priorities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. We will now take a brief adjournment.

---SHORT RECESS

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, colleagues. Thanks to the finance Minister. We'll try to keep you quiet for a little bit here. You did a great job; thank you very much.

Ministers' statements. Members' statements.
Member from Range Lake.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 440-20(1): CONSUMER CARBON TAXATION

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a spectre is haunting our North - the spectre of a zombie carbon tax. Soon, every -- or currently, every major political party leader in Canada at the federal level, Mark -- or soon to be federal leader, Mark Carney, Chrystia Freeland, Pierre Poilievre, even Jagmeet Singh, have given a death sentence to the consumer carbon tax, and the date of its demise is now set for March 9th WHEN Prime Minister Trudeau's successor will be chosen. All those who are vying to replace him have made it clear they'll be abandoning the consumer carbon tax and removing or amending the federal backstop for all provinces and territories. This means no consumer carbon tax in almost every jurisdiction in Canada except for us here in the Northwest Territories where our government is still relying on its so-called made-in-the North carbon pricing regime, and it will be in place long after almost everyone else has shifted responsibility back to Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, the leading contender to lead Canada in Ottawa, if you believe the polls, the NWT's own Mr. Carney has declared the consumer carbon tax a divisive policy that must be replaced with a more effective alternative. His main competitor, my friend Chrystia Freeland, who herself enforced the tax as a federal Minister of Finance, has vowed to scrap the policy in no uncertain terms. The leader of the opposition meanwhile has made axe the tax his slogan so popular it could even be found on some front porches in my riding of Range Lake. Even the NDP, a party well known for its tax and spend mantra, has dropped the carbon tax on their platform. As soon as Trudeau leaves Rideau Hall for the last time, he's taking the tax with him and putting all the responsibility for its continued existence squarely on the shoulders of our territorial government.

So, Mr. Speaker, with such a dramatic change in policy in the last few months at the federal level, our constituents are looking for similar developments here at home. We've heard loud and clear from voters during the last election that the policy's not working for Northerners. Our Premier acknowledges much when he immediately declared his desire for a northern carveout, and I have brought forward a bill, the Carbon Tax Repeal Act, to make that so. So let's get this done. Let's get ahead of the curb. Let's not be caught off guard and wait months to negotiate a new deal with Ottawa. Let's kill

the tax now and save Northerners some money. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 441-20(1):
LAND TRANSFERS TO MUNICIPALITIES

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the devolution of lands and resources from the federal government to the Government of the Northwest Territories was a historic step in strengthening our ability to manage our own land and chart our own economic future. However, the work is not yet complete. Now is the time to take the next step in devolution, one that brings land management decisions closer to the people most affected by them.

Mr. Speaker, our communities are the backbone of the North. They are where families grow, where businesses develop, and where our culture thrives, yet many communities still lack the authority to fully manage the lands within their municipal boundaries. This must change, Mr. Speaker. We need to empower communities with the ability to tax, manage, and plan for the future of all territorial and Commissioner's lands within their community boundaries.

Mr. Speaker, decentralizing decision-making will allow communities to take control of their own land use planning, enable them to prepare for housing development, economic growth, and responsible land management. Local governments know their needs best, and by transferring these powers we will provide them with the tools to build stronger, more resilient communities.

Mr. Speaker, this is about fairness, empowerment, and ensuring that decisions about land are made at the level closest to the people. It is time to complete the process of devolution and ensure that our communities have the authority they need to shape their own futures. I ask my colleagues to join me in supporting this next phase of devolution. Let's bring land management decisions in community boundaries where they belong, into the hands of our communities across the North, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 442-20(1):
2025 SAHTU WINTER ROAD RESUPPLY

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Sahtu winter road resupply 2025: Mr. Speaker, as we know, the Sahtu affordable Mackenzie River barging resupply for the past summer and a half was cancelled. Mr. Speaker, the only alternative affordable resupply system in place is the winter road. With warmer weathers, shortened schedules, challenging landscapes and increased traffic, both domestic and commercial, Mr. Speaker, I cannot emphasize enough on the inventory management and deliveries the Sahtu cannot go through more hardships related to air transportation costs.

Mr. Speaker, Sahtu needs sustainable, essential goods and services. Allow us to imagine the region's eight grocers on annual affordable retail prices while considering annual inventory finances, heated storage costs, expiration dates of goods. This scenario is dramatically concerning to families, commercial projects, and government supplies.

Mr. Speaker, an estimated 1,000 truckloads are expected this season. We have government and Imperial Oil's fuel inventory on the schedule: The Colville Lake school wide loads, the Fort Good Hope construction centre, grocers resupply, household staples, commercial projects, and government inventory and supplies.

Mr. Speaker, typically, normal traffic for the movement of fuel is about 130 truckloads per season; however, for the 2024-2025 season we are anticipating 600 truckloads fuel only which is a priority. This large increase includes both government and Imperial Oil inventories.

Mr. Speaker, I'm equally pleased to announce measures/steps being taken/arranged for sustainable by community engagements with the food bank of Canada, Nutrition North, later this month on affordable groceries. Discussions underway will include supply chains, logistics on the community establishment of food security. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement

---Unanimous consent granted

Mahsi, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you, colleagues. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, it's through resilience these interim measures are underway while Indigenous governments and the Government of the Northwest Territories finalize regulatory and funding arrangements for the Mackenzie Valley Highway. Mahsi.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 443-20(1):
TRAUMA, HEALING AND HARM
REDUCTION

MS. MORGAN: Mr. Speaker, one priority of this Assembly that we talk about surprisingly seldom is addressing the effects of trauma. And when we do talk about healing, we tend to frame it as black or white, all or nothing. We sometimes assume we can just take people with substance addictions from their rock bottom and then send them to treatment to become totally sober, all healed. And maybe that transformation does happen all at once for some people. But our shelters and our streets are overflowing with folks who are not totally sober. Maybe they've tried multiple times, maybe they're at some messy place along their journey. Certainly, they are focused on surviving and managing their pain day to day. These folks often turn to health care workers and staff at non-profits like the Women's Society and the Salvation Army, and we expect those frontline workers to somehow keep them safe day after day. Right now they don't have the tools to keep them safe which puts these frontline workers in a horrible situation. They need better harm reduction tools.

Now, officially, the GNWT has endorsed the principle of harm reduction in documents such as the 2023 Alcohol Strategy, but any harm reduction programs we've actually started to put in place have been starved of resources. What would it look like if this government actually embraced harm reduction?

First, the managed alcohol program, started in 2020 here in Yellowknife at the Spruce Bough supportive living facility, would have proper medical oversight by a nurse or doctor. Managed alcohol would be offered to other shelter users and communities outside Yellowknife. People staying in the hospital who are alcohol dependent would not be forced to detox which has shown to be ineffective and counterproductive anyway. We would establish on-the-land healing camps that don't require folks to be sober first. Safe supply programs would receive dedicated funding instead of public health having to do it off the side of their desk with spare change. There would be a day shelter space where homeless people can safely use. We all want members of our communities to heal and move forward with their lives. But if we're going to be successful, we have to be practical. Start by meeting people where they're at, offer them safety and stabilization, offer them some space, some room to regroup and consider what else is possible. Mr. Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and my colleagues. Healing from trauma is not all or nothing. We need to help people slowly build momentum with small successes supported by a system designed to reduce harms along the way. Thank you, and I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Members' statements. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 444-20(1):
STRUGGLES FOR YOUTH IN MACKENZIE
DELTA COMMUNITIES

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to talk about the struggles of the young people of my riding from Mackenzie Delta. With the recent announcement of closures of the community learning centres and the level of education that our students are receiving at the present time, we see no real future for the younger generation of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, the Indigenous people of my riding are among the highest percentage of the income support program - 15 percent. This program is not doing justice to the individuals who are introduced to this program. I believe this program was intended to be a temporary solution to offset the cost of living when employment opportunities were not available. Instead, the recipients of this program are not given alternatives to be independent and self-sufficient. In turn, we see the recipients making a living from this program.

Mr. Speaker, this government is trying to get its final responsibilities back on track and, at the same time, we are trying to rebuild the economy of the Northwest Territories. In order to build the economy of the Northwest Territories, we need a workforce, a home-grown workforce from the North. We have to invest in our resources. That means investing in our people of the Northwest Territories. Giving handouts, no longer an option, is hurting the government. It is hurting the Northwest Territories' economy. It is hurting the Indigenous governments. It is hurting the communities. And it's hurting the individuals who are reliant on this program.

Mr. Speaker, I realize that there are people out there in our communities who benefit from this program, the disabled and the elderly who are unable to work to sustain their daily needs. Today we have a young age group who are able to work, but they see an easier lifestyle provided by this government. It is time for this government to give the residents of Northwest Territories a voice and conduct public

engagements on how to better provide these services without the recipients of the income support program losing their self-esteem and dignity. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 445-20(1):
STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY FOR THE
2SLTGBTQIPA+ COMMUNITY

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, inspired by a few of my colleagues yesterday, I just wanted to stand up and make a short statement today just about the increase anxiety and stress occurring for 2SLTGBTQIPA+ people south of the border, and I wanted to stand up and make a statement expressing my support and my solidarity for this community here in the territory.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen that we in Canada are not immune to the shift that's happening. Some jurisdictions are beginning to introduce legislation which I've heard is making transgender youth feel unsafe. Mr. Speaker, I have constituents, friends, loved ones in this community. I want you to know that I will fight to maintain your rights and ensure you're supported here in the Northwest Territories. I'm pleased to say that in this government I see us, for the most part, being supportive in the language of our legislation, in our programs, in our consideration of important issues, in the communications I see from the Premier, from government, and I'm happy to see that. I'm committed to ensuring this continues and to ensuring this territory is a welcoming, safe place where anyone can thrive. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 446-20(1):
ILLICIT DRUG ACTIVITY IN MONFWI
COMMUNITIES

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I would like to discuss the drug problem in our communities and the escalating threat of violent crime. This past November, officers from the Behchoko RCMP detachment stopped a suspicious vehicle on Highway No. 3 and found a loaded handgun, approximately 25 grams of what they suspected to be crack cocaine, and \$30,000 in cash. Later the same month, Behchoko RCMP seized \$76,000 and a small quantity of illicit drugs from a different vehicle with Alberta license plates that they had stopped for

suspicious driving. Last February, Behchoko RCMP reported that they seized 1.9 kilograms of cocaine, a semi-automatic handgun and a prohibited extended round magazine, in a single search.

Mr. Speaker, making residents and communities safe is a priority of this Assembly. Drugs are getting into our communities. The people bringing them in carry semi-automatic, automatic weapons, and they are leaving with hundreds of thousands of dollars which, in turn, perpetuates our problem. These suppliers are criminals who prey on vulnerable people. Keeping them out would not solve substance abuse problems overnight, but it will make Behchoko and other communities safer.

Can the Minister of Justice please investigate this matter and take actions to keep vulnerable members of our community safe whether that means stopping more cars on the highway or increasing police presence, something must be done, Mr. Speaker. I will have questions for the Minister of Justice. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Members' statements. Member from Deh Cho.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 447-20(1):
RESPIRE AND HOME CARE SERVICES IN
DEHCHO COMMUNITIES

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker [no translation available].

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to discuss the critical need for respite services and aftercare -- after hours home care in my riding. Mr. Speaker, many elders want to live in their homes for as long as possible. The GNWT currently provides residents with home and community care service after medical based -- after a medical needs-based assessment. This includes respite services so full-time caregivers can take a break. The respite program for local communities is funded by health and social services and supports families in small communities who have children with special needs or loved ones with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, this program is active in Deline, Fort Smith, Aklavik, Fort Liard, and Fort McPherson, where respite workers provide safe individualized and flexible respite support to families and primary caregivers. The program is designed to hire and train local residents so they can provide in-home or in-community relief for caregivers, families and children and youth with disabilities. They work with NWT Disabilities Council to receive training and first aid CPR certification. We need

opportunities like this in the Deh Cho communities, Mr. Speaker.

Many residents also need after hours care or medical attention outside of regular clinic hours. Some of these residents are elders who can no longer drive or have family members who could assist them. We have heard that the current departmental policy prohibits nurses from providing emergency services outside health centres. But, Mr. Speaker, having a home care worker with first responder training, someone with a vehicle who has the proper liability insurance and is familiar to residents, could drastically change the delivery of health services in communities in my riding where there are no ambulatory services. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 448-20(1):
PRIMARY HEALTH CARE APPOINTMENT
AVAILABILITY

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes I think this government misses the important things, the nuts and bolts of people's health care and how their families are impacted by government process, including the government bureaucracy, two favorite words - process and bureaucracy.

Mr. Speaker, I had heard from numerous constituents, but several as of late, about their concerns about getting appointments through the clinics. And this isn't just a Yellowknife issue. This is a territorial issue, Mr. Speaker. So, for example, if you want a same-day appointment, you have to walk down at 7:30 in the morning and stand in line. Now, that doesn't sound too bad, but we can't make online appointments, which has been raised in this house before, even though you can make online doctors' appointments at other clinics in the Northwest Territories. It's often we get into these discussions about real practical solutions that I think this government should seize and run with, Mr. Speaker. But you get down there at 7:30, there's a line of anywhere from 6 to 15 people and therein lies the first part of the problem: There's only a couple online -- or sorry, same-day appointments. So your next appointment, if you made it a couple days ago, would be sometime two months later. But if you're lucky to get one of the two or three appointments, the situation is so bad, the person speaking to the health care professional, the kind person trying to do their job, they're communicating in a way everybody knows their name, everybody knows their birth

date, and not everyone can do wink, wink, nudge, nudge, it's an itch. In other words, privacy is constantly compromised at these clinics in situations. It's not anyone's do fault in the sense of they're not doing this on purpose, but it's just the facilitation of practical, decent stuff that make the everyday family appreciate that their government's trying to work for them.

Mr. Speaker, I can book a plane ticket online. As a matter of fact, I can even deal with CRA online. But I can't book an appointment to see a doctor online. And now, the government will say, including the health Minister about, like, oh my goodness, we have all these technical problems. Well, let's go to the phone system. Well, the phone system, when you call, you get an answering message, if it goes to the answering message, Mr. Speaker, that you'll get a call back within two or three days if you're lucky. It doesn't have the lucky part, Mr. Speaker, I should say, in all fairness. That said, you're lucky to get the phone call response.

Mr. Speaker, there are practical solutions that the government could do. I've raised them. Other members have raised them. We've raised them loud and clear. We can act upon them about service, Mr. Speaker. And that's where my questions will lead later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 449-20(1):
CELEBRATION OF LIFE OF ROSIE
BETTHALE-REID

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Good afternoon, Colleagues. Rose Bethhale-Reid was born at Macahish Lake, also known as Sandy Lake, on May 25th, 1954, to William and Germainie Bethhale. With great sadness, she passed away on January 9th, 2025. For those who knew this lady, she wore many hats. Some would describe her as someone who fought for those less fortunate. Others, she was an interpreter that helped elders. Others, she was the person that would get on the stage to sing or make people laugh even if it was at her own expense. She loved it and didn't care.

I got to know her just before I became an MLA; however, I heard about her before that time. She was committed to getting things done, fight for the underdog, or correcting issues. I can confirm she had an amazing sense of humour. There were numerous times she had me laughing uncontrollably. I got to witness her and her husband's willingness to help out others. They made a great team.

Rosie loved her family deeply. She was always talking about her children, stepchildren, grandchildren, and her husband Kyle. She was very proud of each of them and would show me pictures as she told me their stories. Where possible, she would stop in and see them. The last time I spoke to her was at the airport in Fort Simpson when she came to see her granddaughter who was working at the counter.

Rosie was very spiritual. She and her husband would pray anywhere and at ceremonies or on nature walks. They would feed the fire or water offering tobacco and food, sending their love to God and to the loved ones that passed on. When others passed away, she would gather a group of ladies to help clean the body one last time. As like all celebrations of life, there are so many aspects of a person's life you might miss. I have attached her eulogy done by her son Clinton Betthale and Joe Tambour and a poem done by her granddaughter which I would like them deemed as read and printed in the Hansard.

Colleagues, the family would like to thank all those people that provided support during this difficult time. I can tell you she will be sadly missed.

Eulogy: Clinton Betthale and Joe Tambour

This wonderful person, Rose Betthale-Reid was full of character was born at Macahish Sandy Lake on May 25, 1954, to William and Germainie Betthale.

Whoever would have thought this quiet, sad little girl who grew up in residential should, would grow up to become bigger than personality than anyone one. That she was.

She grew up to be the hilarious, outspoken, singer, dancer, hunter, fisher and just full of life. She loved life to the fullest.

An interpreter, she became, although her traditional language was not strong, she spoke up for people who were too shy or could not speak English. She would even get on the stage with her singing partner, Shirley Bertrand – Jooris. They dressed up and sang together. They would have everyone in an up-roar of laughter. Rosie lived to make people laugh. Even if it was her that they laughed at. She loved it and didn't care.

On quiet moments she would reflect on the hardship and emotional pain she went through. Sadness would overwhelm her, but something would snap her out of it. She mischievously would smile and say, "Take me on now" and would laugh.

She loved her children and grandchildren even more. She relied on her oldest son Clinton for anything and like his mom, he'd support her in every way he can.

Rosie loved to pray anywhere. At ceremonies, she and her brother Louie would feed the fire, offering tobacco and food, sending her love to God, and loved ones that passed on.

At her Petitot camp, she would feed the water and birds. She and Kyle would thank God for everything every day.

Rosie loved to travel with Kyle. They went to Maui and to Jamacia. When they went to Jamaica one time, there was a concert for Bob Marley right in front of their hotel. They opened the balcony doors and windows to hear the music and watched the beautiful sun as it set. Then she told Kyle to take a photo of the sunset. As he struggled with the camera, the sun was gone down. They both stated laughing and couldn't stop laughing. That's when they realized they were stoned from the Marijuana smoke from all the people that were smoking it outside the hotel. So they closed the door and windows right away.

She always loved to share this story, as it got people laughing.

Her dancing partner was her husband, Kyle. Oh, those two loved to dance. This past Christmas holidays, there was a drum dance, and she had a surprise dancer. A little small had grabbed her hand and pulled her into the line of dancers. It was three-year-old Hayze McLeod. Rosie had tears in her eyes for this little dancer.

Rosie and Kyle loved helping people and they never asked for anything in return. Sometimes they would get people to chop wood for them. They would in return give them enough tobacco or a gift card. Both loved going for rides on the Cole's Lake Road. Every time she sees tracks (moose or caribou) they would stop, and she would check to see how fresh the tracks were. She became a good shot too. She usually got what she hunted. One time one of her son's Steven said "she shot two bush chickens. As she ran after them, she tripped and fell and disappeared in the bush. He yelled to see if she was ok then that is when she pooped out holding the two bush chickens, yelling "I got them" with a big Rosie laughter.

Her happiest day was when her and Kyle got married on June 29, 1995, on the front lawn of her late brother William Betthale.

She loved fishing, hunting, going for drives, singing and dancing. She did everything she wasn't allowed to do, when she was young. She wasn't everyone's cup of tea, but she didn't

care. She'll just laugh and say "Ehh, who cares?" Rosie left so suddenly but left a legend.

Poem: Rosie

If roses grow in heaven, Lord
 please pick a bunch for me place them in my
 Grandma's arm and tell her they are from me.
 tell her I love her and miss her and when she
 Turns to smile, place a kiss upon her cheek and
 hold her for a while.
 God saw she was getting tired, and a cure was
 not to be.
 So, he put his arms around her and whispered,
 "Come with me."
 With tear-filled eyes we watched her suffer and
 fade away.
 Although we loved her deeply, we could not
 make her stay.
 A golden heart stopped beating, hard-working
 hands put on rest.
 God broke our heart to prove to us he only
 takes the best.

Read by Megan Steeves

Members' statements. Member from Tu
 Nedhe-Wiilidheh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 450-20(1):
 ACKNOWLEDGING THE PASSING OF TU
 NEDHE-WIILIDEH CONSTITUENTS

MR. EDJERICON: Mr. Speaker, before I focus on the vital work we must do together in this House, I must first report with a heavy heart of the tragedies that have so deeply affected my Tu Nedhe-Wiilidheh communities in the recent months. We dedicate Christmas seasons to our families and loved ones, but sadly this year, our communities were grieving. One after another, I have attended funerals and Celebration of Life to grieve with my community members and their families, and I still grieve with them when I return to my constituency meetings or just a call to check in because the losses are so great; there is still much mourning taking place.

Last year in N'dilo, we lost a respected elder Alex Beaulieu, and then tragically, his son, more recently in the new year, the loss of Roland Conrad also deeply affected the community as well. The Beaulieus are a big family here in the North, and sadly, the loss of Gail Beaulieu, a respected elder who also was a nurse in the Fort Resolution for over 30 plus years. And Tom Beaulieu, Tommy Beaulieu, who is also a respected elder who also worked for the GNWT for 30 plus years in Fort Resolution for the GNWT. As well the people of Fort Resolution experienced even more loss with the respective passing of a young man Anthony King; a well-respected elder Eddie Fabien; a respected elder Nancy Hunter; and

another respected elder Kenny Jean Reimer. Further the loss of the late respected elder who also we all know here in the House and also a translator was the late Tom Unka who was also a respected elder from our community. From so closely we felt and had worked in this building for 15 years with Mr. Unka, and my heart goes out to the families. The loss of another young man Jason Larocque and Sky Champagne, another young lady. It was also a painful experience for the community given their very young age.

The community of Lutselk'e unfortunately experienced their share of profound sorrows as well this Christmas. They also lost Cathy Marlowe, Jamie Sanderson, and Adam Casaway, and their community will never be the same without them. These deep personal losses made for at Christmastime of much grieving and sorrow. The loss of so many elders in such short period of time is a profound reminder that this generation who raised us and guided us are sadly now passing on. Certainly, all cultures cherish and value their elders but for Indigenous communities, we have lost so much to centuries of colonialism, their connection to our land, history, and will be hard to replace. But thankfully, the knowledge they have passed on through their teachings and story tellings, the knowledge of culture they have lived on the land since time immemorial, we will carry through into eternity because our generations will keep the spirit of all of our ancestors alive.

In the long term, their experience are our blessing and will keep us strong. But right now our hearts are still aching. Please pray for my communities, also to all the communities in the Northwest Territories who also lost loved ones in the recent months, because the hard times are easier when we face them together. I just want to say condolences with a heavy heart to all the families in my riding and to the families who lost loved ones over the holidays. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Our condolences go out to all the families and our prayers.

Members' statements. Motions.

Before we go any further, I'd like to look up into the gallery and recognize Mr. Marc Whitford, president from North Slave Metis. Thank you very much for coming to our Assembly.

Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I almost jumped the gun on that one, and thank

you for being as kind as you are. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize Ms. Katie Johnson. She is a Yellowknife Centre constituent, and she's certainly a very strong advocate for inclusive education. She's very smart and hardworking at this issue, and I hope the government heeds some of the lessons and excitement she brings with ideas she channels through me and other Members of this House. Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too want to recognize the North Slave Metis Alliance president Mr. Marc Whitford. Also, I want to acknowledge, again, it's good to see everybody here and all the translators. It's good to see you, welcome back. Mahsi. And lastly, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank everybody in the gallery. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Frame Lake is happy to boast that we have a young page in the House today, Mr. Jacob Couture is here, so thank you to him for all his work and all the pages, of course. And I'm not sure if he's actually still up there, but I saw a constituent, Matt Halliday, who is the new Chamber of Commerce executive director. He's had a busy job in front of him the past couple of weeks. So good to see him in the gallery. There was a couple other constituents who were in the gallery for the Budget Address but quickly disappeared. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Hay River North.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're lucky to have a number of distinguished guests with us today in the gallery, and so I would like to recognize them. I'd like to recognize President Marc Whitford from the North Slave Metis Alliance, of course; Major Tony Brushett from the Salvation Army, a strong partner with the Government of the Northwest Territories; as well as from the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association, executive director Matthew Miller who was the president in the last term, and I worked with him closely, and current president, Ms. Rita Mueller, my former deputy minister and a mentor who I worked with very closely for a number of years, and we're happy to have them here. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Inuvik Twin Lakes.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize Dan Florizone, our newly appointed public administrator here today for the Northwest Territories health and social services. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Inuvik Twin Lakes. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Yellowknife South.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, again, I'm not sure who all is here, but I know that Gayla Thunstrom, the UNW president was here and she also happens to be a Yellowknife South resident. Also representing Yellowknife South here today, Mr. Speaker, North Slave Metis Alliance president Marc Whitford, and I'm very proud to say he is a resident of Yellowknife South. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: I would like to acknowledge Ms. Rita Mueller. She lived in Behchoko for many years and a teacher and a principal, and she is the president of the NWT Teachers' Association. And I have known Rita since 1994 when she first moved to Behchoko, or in Edzo to work at the Chief Jimmy Bruneau School. So I would like to acknowledge and recognize her. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too would like to recognize Ms. Mueller who is now the president of the NWT Teachers' Association. She was also my assistant deputy minister and one of the first people I talked to about my aspirations to be in this House, and she was very encouraging. I'd also like to say thank you very much to all Great Slave pages today in the Assembly. That would be Gabrielle, Sokhna, and Olivier. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Recognition of visitors in the gallery.

I'm going to embarrass Ms. Mueller a little bit. I can date her back to 1992 when she was our aquatics person way back when to our regional person, so I've known Rita, and she's given her heart and soul to the Northwest Territories whether it was through the departments or education. So I thank her very much for all that she does and continues to do, and she is a great mentor and supporter of youth in the Northwest Territories.

If we have missed anyone in the gallery today, welcome to your chamber. I hope you enjoy the proceedings. It is always nice to see people in the gallery, and let's have a good day.

Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Replies to the Budget Address, Day 1 of 7. Nobody wants to do it, eh? Nobody at all? Sorry, had a little bit of fun. Member from Range Lake.

Replies to the Budget Address

MR. TESTART'S REPLY

MR. TESTART: We're having a good day, Mr. Speaker. [No translation available].

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you a story about perseverance and determination. It's about a place where the people are as rugged as the land they call home; where, despite the vast distances between each community, everyone knows everyone. It's about a government that has been tested time and time again by flood, fire, and pestilence, and rose to the occasion when its people needed it most. I am, of course, telling the story of the Northwest Territories. I am proud to be a part of this story. The NWT is my home, and it's the most spectacular place on earth. Nowhere can you find such stark natural beauty, pristine nature, and bountiful resources. From the shores of Great Slave Lake to the riverbanks of the Mighty Mackenzie and all the way to the vast Arctic Ocean, Northerners have occupied these lands since time immemorial, and this is no easy task.

For most of the year, our climate is an active danger to those who are unprepared, and you never know when a wolf, bear, or wolverine is right around the corner. But this experience is what breeds resilience in our people and provides us with the spark of creativity and ingenuity to do so much more with so much less. This is the story of the North, Mr. Speaker. It is our story.

Today, a new chapter is being written and it comes with much uncertainty. Yes, inflation continues to challenge our cost of living. Yes, our diamond mines are closing. Yes, we face the likely imposition of US tariffs. And yet even so, I remain optimistic for our future for if we, as a territory so small in population but so big on ambition, can overcome so much with grit and nerve, well, we can overcome these challenges and build a stronger future for our children and grandchildren.

At \$2.5 billion, this budget has the second largest revenue gain in the history of the Northwest Territories. We boast a double A credit rating and are on the cusp of unlocking more fiscal flexibility to invest in our future, grow

our economy, and create good jobs for all our residents. We have renewed alliances with Indigenous nations and brought new resources in from the federal government to meet our most pressing needs. Canada's National Arctic and Northern Policy Framework promises new investment and security for our communities as they fulfill their destiny as the custodians of Canada's sovereignty in an international contest for dominance in the North.

Mr. Speaker, our economy may be changing but our government's historic strong financial stewardship has prepared us for what we have always known was coming. We've managed the boom and bust cycle before but this time we have built a robust public administrative sector in our economy that acts as a stabilizing force for the often unpredictable cycles inherent to natural resources. While some in the past may have questioned why the GNWT has expanded its workforce to such a degree, well, this is why - to serve communities in times of economic turbulence and captain our economy back to prosperity. Northerners have nothing to fear. This government has got your back and we will continue to fight for you no matter the cost.

Mr. Speaker, I have a confession to make - I think this a very lovely story but sadly it's not the one we heard earlier today, and it's not the tone that has been set by this Cabinet. It's easy, as you can see, to draw on the strengths of the GNWT as a foundation for progress, but instead we hear time and time again from this government a tone that is both simultaneously overwhelmed and underwhelming. The government is broke; we're on the edge of the fiscal cliff; there's no money for your priorities, and on and on and on. This gloomy messaging is so pervasive that yesterday a constituent asked me, and honestly I might add, if the GNWT was declaring bankruptcy and shutting down and if so, what would happen to their government-backed loans.

The Member for Deh Cho often tells me that language is key to personal and professional success, that through proper messaging and positivity anyone can make things happen. It is a very wise message but seemingly lost on our speech writers as a government. So let's get into, Mr. Speaker, and tell the story of this budget. It starts and ends in the same place: The status quo.

Despite loudly proclaiming the fiscal sustainability strategy at the start of this Assembly — without the collaboration from Regular Members I might add, the GNWT continues to spend taxpayer money with abandon. Forced growth and new initiatives are supposedly held at \$10 million a year and yet

again we have in excess of \$90 million in new spending, an overall -- an overall increase to the entire budget of 6.5 percent from the last estimates to the tune of \$145.5 million.

Mr. Speaker, how are we supposed to tell our public servants they can't buy new pens and copier toner when we can't stick to our own promises on fiscal management? As we speak, nurses in the ER aren't allowed to buy ginger ale for patients, but we can blow past our spending caps without blinking an eye. Oh don't worry, if we hit the debt ceiling we can just ask for another billion dollars from the prime Minister. We already have a borrowing limit that equals our sister territories combined.

The public accounts do not lie, Mr. Speaker, and they paint a troubling picture. All financial health indicators point to a worsening economy burdened with public debt and totally reliant on federal transfer payments. Last year our resource royalties were a whopping zero dollars, which should continue to alarm Northerners, not because companies aren't paying their fair share but because so few of them are paying at all. This cannot continue. This government needs to take fiscal sustainability seriously or stop talking about it altogether because we're trying nothing, and we're all out of ideas.

Not only is this government failing to meet its sustainability goals, but its failing to meet its mandate to deliver on the priorities of the 20th Assembly. Of \$2.375 billion, only \$147.5 million are being used to fulfil our priorities. That's 6 percent. What political system delivers budgets where 94 percent of spending is directed by unelected public officials rather than elected representatives? If this isn't the tail wagging the dog, then what is, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, there is another story I want to tell. It's about our potential to be so much more. My honourable friends of the Regular Member seats have pleaded with our decision makers to take more measured risks and swing for the fences. We have yet to see that happen. But let me give you an example of what could come -- from what could happen for the Northwest Territories from our commonwealth family.

The Channel Islands are an archipelago in the English Channel off the French coast of Normandy. They are divided into two United Kingdom Crown dependencies: The Bailiwick of Jersey, which is the larger of the islands, and the Bailiwick of Guernsey consisting of Guernsey, Alderney, Sark, Herm, and some smaller islands. When comparing the economies of Jersey and Guernsey, Jersey generally performs significantly better with

larger GDP, higher GDP per capita, and stronger growth in recent years, largely driven by a thriving financial services sector, while Guernsey's economy has shown signs of stagnation or even decline compared to their neighbours. By the numbers, Guernsey's GDP is 3,488 million pounds, or \$6,249 million Canadian, compared to Jersey's of 6.5 billion pounds, or \$11 billion Canadian. This is a staggering difference between the two economies, and while there are many differences between the two states, the financial services sector is a major pillar of Jersey's economy, contributing significantly to its GDP. The growth and stability of this industry is not by accident. The island imposes a corporate tax rate of zero percent for most companies, with financial service firms only paying 10 percent, making it an attractive destination for businesses seeking tax advantages. A maximum income rate of 20 percent applies to people who establish residency in Jersey. Those prospective residents who are high net worth individuals must meet and sustain a minimum income of 1.2 million pounds, or about \$1.5 million Canadian. Income that exceeds this minimum is subject to an additional 1 percent tax and while -- and no taxes are levied against capital gains or capital transfers.

So why are the affairs, Mr. Speaker, of these two tiny islands two oceans away important to this House? Because it shows how different that a change in tax policy has profoundly reshaped the fortunes of Jersey compared to its neighbour. This is a lesson we must learn in the Northwest Territories. There is no reason why Northerners need to be taxed to the level we are today considering the high cost of living and the many challenges to our continued growth. The revenues earned from personal and corporate income tax are dwarfed by federal transfers and the territorial funding -- territorial financing formula grant. Furthermore, decreasing tax revenues would not affect this funding formula, allowing us to keep earning a grant based on average taxation rates while we actually charge far less. This would be a huge incentive for corporations and individuals to relocate to the NWT to take advantage of these lower tax rates. We can also seek to negotiate an exemption to federal taxation here in the NWT to extend this advantage further.

Is this novel approach to tax policy that incentivizes the growth of a financial services industry a new thing? Absolutely. Is it risky? Totally. But when you consider that the generational changes that could be borne from such a move, we can't afford not to do it or something like it. Far too often this entire system of government is paralyzed by its own

profound lack of imagination and ambition. We can and must dream bigger if we are to save the NWT from an economic crash that will be far worse than the austerity exercises that have been contemplated in the past. Instead of a cohesive plan that achieves balanced budgets while building a better future, we have a government that continues to fail to curb its own expenditures while actively making program delivery worse through marginal cuts. This has resulted in a loss of confidence from Northerners in our economy, not to mention a morale crisis that is spreading fast through the public service.

Mr. Speaker, it's time to get back on track. We have precious little time in this Assembly to course correct and start making the right investments in our future. It's time to undo the cuts that have hurt our constituents and start making some real change for our economy.

Mr. Speaker, here are some ideas that we can start moving forward on. We can end the income testing for extended health benefits that has added additional costs to constituents where many of them are telling me they are worse off today than they were a year ago when we first took office. We can end the consumer carbon tax and transition to a cap and trade model to ensure that polluters pay and consumers don't, and we take the tax burden off of everyday northern families and working people in the Northwest Territories. We can expand professional development funding for health care professionals who are currently limited to -- I believe it's \$2,000 and have to share hotel rooms when they go to conferences instead of being able to learn and network at these important events and encourage more people, more health care workers, to come to the Northwest Territories. We can double the mineral incentive program, maybe even triple it, and expand that economic multiplier across our economy and bring more exploration projects into the Northwest Territories. We can expand community funding to 100 percent of what they're owed by our own formula financing. Let's find the money to do that because money spent on local economics has the greatest impact, far more impactful than money spent by the GNWT. We can cut tax rates for beer and cannabis producers. These are small industries, but they have the potential to create enormous growth. Right now, small brewers in Alberta employ more people than oil and gas. This is something that could support our tourism industry, and all they're looking for is a little help from our government.

Mr. Speaker, we need a rooting decision for the Taltson hydroelectric submarine cable line. We need to complete that expansion and bring power, cheap affordable clean power into the

Slave Geological Province. We've waited too long for a decision. Now is the time, and this government needs to move forward on that as quickly as possible.

We need to expand community safety officer programs throughout the Northwest Territories. We have had one pilot on the books that continues to be extended. Communities are hurting. We just heard the honourable Member from Monfwi talk about it today. There are drug dealers in our communities. There is crime in our communities and community members don't feel safe. We can't afford to put a detachment in every community, but we can afford community safety officers.

We need to look at our NIHB commitments, our non-insured health care commitments, which are -- we operate on behalf of the federal government. And for why? We're not getting paid for that, and we're spending an enormous amount of our own treasure for something that we're not getting compensated for. We have a great partnership with the Council of Leaders, with Indigenous governments, all across the territory. Let's rely on them to get Ottawa to pay for this program that is their responsibility. And while we're at it, let's get them to cover Metis health benefits as well. These are decisions that require some political will and capital to achieve, and this is the kind of leadership that Northerners are looking for. We can cut costs by showing real leadership and going back to the negotiating table. It doesn't all have to be lost as to jobs and programs.

Mr. Speaker, Aurora College is not working. It's been very clear to me, and many Members of this House, that this institution is continuing to take -- we continue to throw good money after bad on this. The closure of the CLCs with no notice to this Assembly, or even the Minister, is shocking to say the least. And I think it's time we let them sink or swim on their own. I'm proposing a 30 percent cut to their funding. They should establish a foundation, do some fundraising, and find those resources on their own. It's time for them to learn how to be an independent institution and cut the GNWT leash.

Mr. Speaker, oil and gas needs to be part of our future as well. We are in an increasingly insecure time for Canada and for the West. We cannot rely on trading partners that we could ten years ago. We might not even be able to rely on the US. So we need to develop our own sources of energy. And now is the time to incentivize and encourage people to look for oil and gas resources in the Northwest Territories and develop the proven resource that we already have - Cameron Hills, the work that the Inuvialuit are doing on their natural gas plant

and, of course, the offshore which comes up for renewal, the offshore moratorium which expires in 2027. Let's plan for that future because if we get one offshore drilling rig can replace -- or will exceed the royalties of all the diamond mines put together. And that is money we can invest in our future that doesn't come from taxpayers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to pay too much money on agency nurses, agency nurses that are taking away local jobs, local opportunities, and not providing continuity of care in our communities. These are expensive, unnecessary, and we need to solve the fundamental problems in our health care system with staffing and morale and not keep hiring expensive hired guns from the south that have no connection to our communities. Mr. Speaker, we need to phase them out. We need to phase them out by 2026.

Mr. Speaker, I talked about our friends in Jersey and Guernsey. Mr. Speaker, it's time for a tax cut for personal income tax. It's also time for a tax cut in corporate income tax. As I said, these are -- we'll lose some revenue but the gains of an increased population of taking the edge off the cost of living, these are things we should be looking for and things we can deliver, Mr. Speaker. And I understand that chambers of commerce, that local banks, they've looked at this, they've explored this, let's work with them and bring a proposal forward for the Minister of Finance to execute. Let's lower the taxes now. It's not time to wait on this. It's time to act. Let's get ahead of things and start building a generational change for our future.

Mr. Speaker, if we legalize online gaming, something that I'm proponent of, we could bring in 7 to \$8 million, as much as that in additional revenue for no administrative cost. Just imagine what we could do with that extra money. Imagine the jobs it would save, the programs it would save, the debt we could pay off just from writing a piece of legislation or some regulations. This is something we must do. It's something that is long overdue. And I know the Minister has said he is supportive, so I look forward to working with all the Cabinet on that one because I think taxation is something we need. But we can't be afraid of it. We can't be afraid of these industries that have a bad reputation because they're there, they're happening, and as long as they're unregulated, we can't keep people safe from them.

Mr. Speaker, we are putting enormous burdens on our schools and students and teachers with curriculum changes, with decaying infrastructure, things we need to invest in. Some places haven't had school replacements for a long time. It's time to look at our schools

and -- especially the decisions that we place on them and fund them properly, especially therapeutic services. These are at-risk services because they are expensive, they're difficult to staff, but without them our kids will be even farther left behind, and Indigenous kids, in particular, will be most hardest hit if we pull back on therapeutic services. Currently, in Yellowknife at least, it's the school boards who are providing the lion's share of that funding. We need to help them succeed.

Mr. Speaker, we can offer -- we need to incentivize frontline workers in our health care system. We can only do that if we start spending more money on shift premiums, on labour market supplements, on retention bonuses for frontline nurses, doctors, and allied health care staff. We need to make the floor a desirable place to be because currently people are fleeing it like it's on fire. And that's not good for morale. It's creating staff shortages. I can show you numbers that would make your head spin, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have many more ideas, and we'll take time speaking about them, but this is what we should be looking at, ways to do business differently, not status quo budgets that aren't moving the needle. How many more times are we going to have the same thing presented in this House whilst we're being told we're not allowed to spend money? Sustainability is the order of the day. If sustainability is the order of the day, let's see some reductions and they're just not there.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will be reviewing this budget. I will be presenting further ideas, but I am unsatisfied, my constituents are dissatisfied, and they're alarmed. We need to do better as a government, and we need to build a better future for the Northwest Territories. And I look forward to the debates in this chamber because we are far from doing that with Budget 2025. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Replies to Budget Address, Day 1 of 7. Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE'S REPLY

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be trying something a little bit different this year. Last year I spent a couple of weeks honing and writing a statement that ended up running out of about 20 minutes and had every possible idea that I could put into it, not unlike the Member for Range Lake that just laid out quite a -- I don't know what to call that -- a mandate, I suppose. But what I'm going to give this year is an initial reaction to the budget. You know, we just heard the Minister's

speech, and I want to some of my initial thoughts, and just to hedge that with saying, you know, obviously, the budget is now out. I want an opportunity to engage with my constituents, hear from people, hear if people have concerns with anything, and develop kind of a final position on it after doing that.

Mr. Speaker, something that stood out to me, I had a constituency meeting on Monday, and I reached out to a colleague and said, you know, in some ways I'm a bit unsure how to react to this budget. There's not a whole lot in there to get very angry or particularly excited about. And, again, maybe I need to be changing the coffee that I'm drinking in the morning because certainly the Member for Range Lake found a lot to get excited about in there. But anyways, the point being, Mr. Speaker, is, you know, we -- what I've seen, and similar to the Member for Range Lake, is a pretty status quo budget. You know, it's not a budget -- I had some constituents express concern that they were going to see some heavy cuts coming forward. Considering all the communication about fiscal responsibility that we've heard over the past year, people thought this was going to be a really difficult budget. I'm not seeing big, big changes, and I'm not seeing big initiatives either.

And so we just heard from the Finance Minister. We heard the messaging of the government. So what story do I see?

Mr. Speaker, the story that emerged for me over the past two weeks while committee was reviewing the budget is I see us struggling to action some of our priorities effectively because we are struggling to manage our finances effectively. As pointed out previously, we have not been able to follow the government's own Restoring Balance fiscal policy. The Minister speak to this, spoke to the reasons for it. But the bottom line is we haven't done it. And I think that we are also not substantively actioning some of our priorities. In a few cases, I do think that we are heading in the right direction and starting to get on the right track. I want to acknowledge good work where I see it. Over the past year, the government has established a health care sustainability unit, hired a public administrator, actions that tell us that they're taking the difficulties that we're having with the health care system keeping it sustainable, keeping it fiscally sustainable primarily also, and they're taking that seriously and actioning that. We are yet to see what that looks like. I've got a bit more to say about that later.

When I was listening to the Premier's speech the other day, I noted that, you know, there's a fair bit in there about the safe communities priority. They have taken a fair bit of action, and

I'm looking forward to seeing results from that. The one critique I might make is what I don't see attached to the actions is are we trying to measure anything, have we set targets, what is the target that we're trying to achieve, and what does success look like. I think in some cases that is our biggest struggle, is communicating what is success going to look like for this government.

Mr. Speaker, departments have made millions of dollars in operational cuts, significant cuts over the past year. They have been trying. I would note that this year it was largely offset by a new collective agreement that added \$74 million per year that we have to find the money for. I believe the government speak for this is forced growth, as we like to call it. One Member did point out that some of the growth is forced. We also have a lot of excluded employees, and we make a choice to increase their salaries at the same level that we increase unionized staff; so it's not all forced, there are choices involved in some of the growth that we're seeing.

Mr. Speaker, I was reflecting last night -- we were looking at the supplementary estimates. And I was reflecting last night on, you know, my experience in the previous government that I sat in the leadership seat for at the City of Yellowknife and the fact that at the municipal level, the government really struggles to make ends meet. The government really pinches pennies and squeezes the most out of every possible dollar. And I spoke to, you know, sometimes I would walk the halls of city hall and honestly feel a bit guilty. These weren't fancy offices. This wasn't a, you know, a government that was rife with cash. In some cases, I think -- you know, this is just a little shout out to our city, but, you know, city hall could really use some renovations. But this was a government that has to balance its budget every single year. This is a government that has to make tough decisions. You'd see city staff driving around in a pickup truck from 1995 because tough decisions have to be made, and we have to stretch every dollar.

I'm not sure I see the same level of penny pinching at the GNWT yet. The Member for Range Lake pointed out that there's been a spending freeze but over the years, you know, the government has very nice buildings, they have very nice offices, they have nice vehicles. There's many things that tell me that this is not a government that is trying to squeeze the most out of every possible dollar that we can. That's just what I've seen. It's just a comparison that I make between the way the municipality operates and the way our government operates.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk to one of the issues that I think keeps coming up for me and continues to be a problem that vexes our ability to move forward.

Mr. Speaker, the government did articulate a mandate, and MLAs worked hard to set very focused priorities. I don't think that we did enough to establish specific targets or identify exactly what we meant and, as I mentioned earlier, define what success would like look for those priorities. What do we mean? What do we mean success is going to look like for our housing priority, for example.

And one of the frustrations that I find myself repeating and becoming a bit of a broken record on is priority implementation. We have to focus on the priorities we've set. This has got -- our mandate has got to be where we focus our energy. And, Mr. Speaker, I don't think priority implementation is as difficult as we're making it out to be.

I think of one of my constituents. Of course I'm going to change their name for their privacy. We're going to call her Emily today. Emily is seeking a unit in public housing. She has a disabled son, facing significant challenges. Emily really, really needs a home. I have been e-mailing back and forth with the housing Minister's staff and the housing Minister herself for a year now trying to get Emily off of the waiting list into a home, a home that's accessible, something that's appropriate for her and her son to live in, to hopefully thrive, to better the conditions that they're currently living in. It's really easy for me to see that one of my priorities has to be getting Emily into a home. And so when I think about our priorities, when I think about actioning priorities, it's very easy for me to take Emily on one hand and say, yes, that I've absolutely no doubt that putting her in a public housing unit is something that needs to happen, an accessible public housing unit. And I can take any number of activities that the government is doing -- I'm not going to name them, I'm not going to name a specific thing here -- but I'm going to say that I can say many of them and say is this as high a priority for me as putting Emily in a home. It is not. This is the priority. It is clear as day to me. And I think that we need to go through that kind of exercise. We have got to look within. We've got to determine what is important, what is most important -- that's what priorities mean -- and we have to determine what can we let go of in order to make substantive and real change and real action toward the priorities that we've set. That's what priority setting looks like. And I think everybody in this room must have an Emily. It's really easy for me when that's the exercise that I go through.

And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that if we have to make difficult decisions, that is a very easy story for me to bring back to my constituents. It's very easy for me to say this is the reason a difficult decision had to be made because we're doing this, we are doing a good thing, we're doing a moral thing, we're doing what government should be doing. What's difficult is if we're just saying we're doing fiscal responsibility because we need to save money. That's not the most compelling story you can tell a constituent. We had to make this difficult decision you don't like. Well, the government's running out of money. We're doing a lot of things with it, big mixture of things, but we can't put Emily in a home because we're out of money. And this leads me to a point that I've also been speaking to and I think also is one of the high level problems that is preventing us from moving forward in a positive way.

In a lot of cases, we are either struggling to or not measuring the results of what we're doing. So when I hear talk about new revenue sources, also known as taxes, things that residents don't want to be hearing about, can I reasonably say that we are getting good value for money out of all of the programs that the government offers and we absolutely need to put this revenue source in place in order to make it happen? It's a very difficult thing to say yes to. It's difficult because we're not measuring some of the things that we're doing. We don't have good measures to help us determine is this program working? Is it achieving what we need it to achieve? You know, the finance Minister implemented -- started to implement GRI last term. I think it was a great initiative. It hasn't quite taken on the urgency that I think it needed to in order for it to help us with these kind of decisions. What is working, what isn't, how can we move resources in such a way to help us succeed.

I want to speak a bit to some of the priorities that are important to me in this budget. Housing is top of mind, again.

I want to recognize that political decision-making often gets ahead of a government's ability to implement. Where we're at right now is the Department of Housing NWT is currently doing a lot of work to implement the priorities that were set and the direction that was given in the previous Assembly. This is a problem that I encountered at the city also, that council's decision-making got way ahead of administration's ability to actually carry out the various plans and things that we're approving to the point where plans were getting left behind and forgotten and council was approving new plans. It can happen here too. So I recognize that in a lot of ways, the decisions that we make here about housing and the path that we set

forward is going to be something that is going to have to carry into the future of the next Assembly. But, Mr. Speaker, if we don't clearly lay that path out now, if we don't establish targets, if we don't tell residents what success is going to look like and what we're trying to achieve, we are failing to tell our story and we are failing to effectively action the priority that we set.

On housing, we just received a presentation from a researcher and the Standing Committee on Social Development has been working very hard on the housing as a human right. And something that the presenter highlighted to me is the idea of self-sufficiency. And this was a big theme in our priority setting session which I think has been lost along the way. But it's right there at the beginning of our priorities. The 20th Assembly wants a territory where people are supported, where they want to live, work, and grow. What that meant to me, and for people who weren't in the room when we were having those conversations, MLAs were advocating for building up people's self-sufficiency, self-reliance, reducing the amount of dependence on government. So I do take a small pause when I talk about the housing priority that I don't think that the status quo, that the system, as it is, is going to be that success that I'm speaking about. I think that we need to change significantly what we're doing. And so that's going to take planning. It's going to take time. This is not a problem that we can just throw money at. But I can tell you that we are not funding it adequately to succeed right now.

The presenter emphasized the need for us to foster self-sufficiency and self-reliance, agency over decisions, increased attention to education and skill development, and the potential for the housing sector to create local economic development. Those are things that I want us to be focusing on in our plan for housing in the story that we're telling and the targets that we're setting for this department and this priority.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to health a little bit. As I noted, a lot of action has been taken regarding health care sustainability. I think this is good. I think it's necessary. I do want to put a small caveat on it that I am a little bit worried that health is going to end up, by virtue of the fact that we've created these systems, that we brought in the administrator, that we brought in the health care sustainability unit, that we could be at risk of throwing the baby out with the bath water. And we need to remember that one of the priorities we set was increasing people's access to primary care. So in fostering health care sustainability, I just want us to be careful to note that we are still looking to increase the service the residents are getting on the ground.

Economic development, I could say a lot. I'm starting to run out of time. I just want to very quickly say, and I said this in my reply to the Budget Address last year, education is a big piece of this. I spoke to it with housing. I will be speaking in the House this session about workforce development again, and I certainly have a lot to say about Aurora College. I'm very concerned about how the college is operating, Mr. Speaker.

In the past weeks, my community colleagues have joined me in being concerned as they watched the community learning centres close. At least we can say the college is dealing out something to be concerned about for everyone, but I'm not really sure this is what we had in mind. It's a very big concern for me, Mr. Speaker. I've spoken extensively about my belief in the dream of what Aurora College could be. I'm going to continue fighting for it.

And I want to highlight again self-sufficiency and its importance in our priorities. If we want to develop our economy, we have to focus on our workforce, on the students who aren't being prepared to enter it, and how we're going to get them the credentials they need to participate meaningfully in the economy. It is such a big piece.

To close, Mr. Speaker, I want to speak about something I saw in the news the other day. One of my favorite pundits, Chantal Hebert, was reflecting on the coming situation with Mr. Trump being elected and she was saying, you know, what I want to see and what I'm not seeing yet, is who is going to rise up and be the adult in the room. Who is going to set, you know, this political bickering aside -- she was talking about the political leaders -- and actually stand up, be the adult in the room, do the things that need to be done. I really appreciated that characterization. And I think that we need to stand up and be the adults in the room. Difficult decisions need to be made. I want to emphasize that we need to be measured and careful. We have to acknowledge that this territory's economy relies largely on government. Cuts are going to hurt. We have to do it in a careful way. We have to do it in a way that promotes our priorities. We have to do it in a way that minimizes the pain, that ensures that what we're doing is effective, that we are actioning our priorities effectively. We need to approach our challenges with reason, with evidence, with strength of conviction, with decisiveness, and resolve. Do we have the courage to be the -- and the strength to be the leaders this territory needs right now, to be the adults in the room?

Over the past year, Mr. Speaker, I have had my moments of doubt. When I see us looking at

cuts, I hear well, we don't want to do this, don't want to do that; yes, we absolutely need to make tough decisions but not that one. Around and around we go on the wheel of consensus government. Do we have the humility, Mr. Speaker, to look at ourselves in how we contribute to this problem and stand up, be the adults in the room, and make the tough decisions? I want to be optimistic, Mr. Speaker. I believe that a majority of Members in this chamber are up to the task. This room is full of people who I respect, who have shown me they are prepared to do what's needed to get this territory on a positive track. Let's come together and build consensus around the work that needs to be done. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Colleagues, we're going to have a brief break because we have two more replies to the budget today. So we're going to take a brief break.

---SHORT RECESS

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, colleagues. Replies to the Budget Address, Day 1 of 7. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON'S REPLY

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to reflect back as the MLA for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh, going back to the 19th Assembly. I came in halfway through a by-election, and I put forward a wish list on what we wanted to see for my riding. And I brought that forward to the Premier of the day Caroline Cochrane, and I even brought it up in the House here. And when I did, what I was told was that the train had left. By that time, we were halfway through the four-year mandate and she said she'll try her best to throw my priorities on the train as it moves. And needless to say that in the last two years of that term, my luggage didn't make it on that train.

So anyway, going back to the 20th Assembly now, learning from what happened in the 19th Assembly, I put forward, on March 15th, 2024, a wish list. It was addressed to the Premier and the Ministers and outlining what we wanted to see in our riding.

I'll just briefly talk about maybe Lutselk'e, I'm talking about a winter road, dust control, housing, homeownership repairs, and that's just a couple to name off what I can remember. But also going into Dettah, our school there is over 50 years old, and it's in dire need of a new school in that community. It was on a -- it was on the capital plan back in the 19th Assembly but somehow it was taken off and never put back on. And right now that school is -- we

definitely need a new school there in Dettah. N'dilo, what we need there too as well is that we have an outdated gym that's undersized for the size of the community we have. And that gym needs to be replaced and replaced with a new community hall, similar to the one that they have on the Hay River Reserve ideally will work. The school in N'dilo as well is that even though it's a newer school, they didn't put a gymnasium on there. So between Dettah and N'dilo, the kids got to walk, if it's 45 below, maybe a couple hundred yards to the gymnasium so they could use it.

So when I put my list forward in this letter to the Minister outlining what we want to see in our four communities, and I never seen a reply back to my letter. So when I look at this budget now, I am deeply concerned because that budget does not reflect on what I put forward. And I want to say that small communities do matter. Even though my riding gets less than half a percent of the overall budget, at the same time when I try and figure out where does the money go, we're rolled into South Slave region into the North Slave region, but yet I represent the Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh riding. And trying to get that name change and so that we could better understand where all that money is going. So I am disappointed that my concerns that was brought to me from my riding is not reflected in the budget.

But I want to point out one thing separate from that is that when we take an oath in this House, we sign that oath to say that we'll respect the treaties. The mace that's here today is also from the Crown. So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out that I got a treaty book here. That's Treaty 8. This treaty book that was signed here in this area here, for the Dogribs in this area from Dettah, we have Chief Drygeese. Also we have one of my great great grandfathers also signed that same treaty. I just want to remind this House that when we took that oath, the treaty is alive and well. So when we get money from Ottawa from grants and contribution under this budget now is about \$1.7 billion.

A few weeks ago in committee, I raised the issue about the needs of our communities, and I brought that same issue up about treaties. Where's the Crown consultation and accommodation? Because my treaty is still alive and well until I give it up, and it's still in my back pocket. So my concern here is that when I brought this up in committee to the finance Minister of the day was that the GNWT policies that are in place now are superseding my treaties, and that's concerning, Mr. Speaker.

I want to talk about -- a little bit about housing and health care. It's also in the treaties. But right across Canada right now at the AFN level,

which I -- when I was a chief, I attended a lot of AFN housing meetings, and back in the day, 1999, there were about 45,000 homes short. Today we're pushing 120,000 homes. Here in the Northwest Territories, we need at least 10,000 homes to catch up. But right now, if all the HAP houses that were built back in the late '80 -- early '80s to 2000 -- give or say 2000, they're reaching their 50-year life. Right now we're pushing 40 some odd years already in those homes. If those homes are not repaired today, then the fire marshal could come in and just say that's not liveable, and they could shut it down. Then we're going to have huge problems here in the Northwest Territories. So I am deeply concerned about that.

But, Mr. Speaker, I am -- just want to talk a little bit about the budget that's presented here today is that in the 20th Assembly we put forward four priorities of this government, and right now the budget that's approved today takes up 6 percent of that budget of the four priorities we put forward. I looked at the budgets for housing, for example. No different than last year. Finance, shared corporate services this time around is \$81.28 million. The housing corporation budget is \$118 million. Total of \$199,000. But I said -- like I said, 76 cents on the dollar that comes from grants and contribution from Canada works out to be 76 cents. But yet I cannot help my own people in Lutselk'e for repairs in their home. I was just there a few days ago, and they're really frustrated. So we wanted to put forward at least 500 homes into this budget. It didn't work out. That meant if I would have got 15 homes for my riding per year, that would have been perfect. But that didn't happen. So I'm a little disappointed about that.

So at the end of the day, again, is that the policies are superseding my treaties that are section 35 rights. But yet we get 1.8 -- \$1.7 billion from Ottawa that we're managing. And then the deputy ministers as I sit here in that table here, they come in and they ask for more monies to do their jobs, but yet they can't go into Fort Resolution, Dettah, N'dilo, or Lutselk'e, or any small communities and say what's best for you; what do you guys need? Well, they don't even meet with the chief and council and the Metis council or the local governments. They just assume that they know what's best for you. They're managing that money on our behalf. So I am a little disappointed that what I see in this budget now doesn't take in consideration what I put forward in my letter. Again, small communities do matter.

I don't know what to tell the people in Fort Resolution, Dettah, N'dilo, and Lutselk'e, and all small communities for that matter that we're not fixing the problems on housing. We got a

spending freeze right now in the government. Housing's on that list. So how are we going to address these problems when we don't have a plan? I brought this up when we got together with the leaders in the fall after we got elected. Maybe it's time that we have to take a look at the whole government. Why are we in this situation?

Last year I asked the question to the Finance Minister in the 19th Assembly is there going to be austerity, and the response I got back was no, not right now. We're just going to leave that to the next government. So that can was kicked over to this government. But the next four years, Mr. Speaker, we got \$150 million per year and for this year, we got to do the same thing. Third year and fourth year, that's \$600 million. Now we see cuts in the colleges, changes to the affirmative action policy, now to the aboriginal policy, and changes were even made to accommodate P2s.

I guess what I'm trying to say, Mr. Speaker, is that I am disappointed in the way that -- you know, I thought this government is a consensus government. We pride ourselves on that. We say we work together and we move forward. But, Mr. Speaker, I haven't seen it. As much as I want to say that, you know, yes, I could work with all -- everybody in the House, my colleagues, but it's tough. And now we're going to ask that we increase this budget, increase the debt limit. To what end?

So I am disappointed that the treaties that I just spoke about, even though parts of it is negotiated, but we got the Inuvialuit claim, we got the Gwich'in claim, Sahtu claim, Tliche claim, the Metis that are signed the AIP. The Akaitcho's close to AIP. Deh Cho is still on the drawing board. But sooner or later, we're going to get them done. And if we get them done, then what's our relationship going to be or what's it going to look like? Because those claims and treaties have section 35 rights. It ain't going away. So we have to take that in consideration.

UNDRIP, we passed that last -- I think in the 19th Assembly. Now we're talking about implementation of that. I have not seen nothing in this book that talks about that. UNDRIP also talks about the recognition of the treaties. To catch up with the housing need in the Northwest Territories needs to be addressed. Health is also a treaty right. We call that the medicine chest.

So we really need to take a look at our own back yard. We got to take a look at how we govern ourselves. If we say that it's consensus government, let's work together. But I don't know what is happening in Cabinet until I read it in Cabin Radio. So it's really frustrating for me

as an ordinary MLA looking back, watching everything unfold. I got -- we all have on this side aboriginal people in the Northwest Territories are half the majority of people here. A lot of stuff that's going to impact us, the tariffs. And I'm going to be asking the Premier about this in the next couple of days as well.

I'll use that as an example where Northern Store or Hudson Bay Company. Right now there is a Hudson Bay Company or Northern Store up and down the valley. So if the tariffs are put in, the groceries going to go up. Do we buy from that store? What impacts are we going to have in small communities? Northern Store sells gas. We rely on gas for our trapping, hunting, and fishing.

So, Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying here today is not only I'm disappointed in this budget. It didn't take into the small communities issues and concerns. The policies of this government are superseding my treaties, especially when that money comes from Ottawa and 76 cents on the dollar on grants and contribution. If I believe right, committee were also -- were told that for housing negotiable was a word used where we were trying to fight for more housing for small communities, and there were some commitments made about \$50 million a year, or \$50 million for the duration, but there's no guarantee we're going to get that money. So I'm really to the point where I'm going to go back and talk to my leadership, get feedback, and let them know what to do when it comes to budget again on the borrowing limit, raising the debt limit. It's going to be very tough because our communities don't get their share of money that they need to build the infrastructure they need. Again, small communities do matter, but nobody's listening.

You know, the other day I hear the Premier talking about giving how good of a job and the situation this government's doing in the last year but on this side of the House, I'm in the dark. So, Mr. Speaker, it's really concerning to me now that we're in this situation as this government goes forward trying to figure out how we're going to cut back \$600 million in four years, and it will be on the backs of small communities, and I don't want to see that.

I know Cabinet is working with Council of Leaders, and I'm sure they're going to voice their concerns as well about their frustration. But right now as it is, we got to do better and do Crown consultation and accommodation. And we're not doing that. Our treaties are alive and well.

Mr. Speaker, we need to do better, but at this point I'm to the point now where I want to write a letter to King Charles saying that we have a

Treaty 11, Treaty 8. The Government of Canada recognizes it in section 35. The Governor General passes that on to the provinces and the territories. But right now in small communities, it's not working. So I am going to write a letter and let the people know, King Charles, that the treaties of Canada and the Northwest Territories are not honoured and respected, and it's still alive and well.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to take this opportunity to do my response to the Budget Address and I am going to say mahsi. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Colleagues, I'd like to remind you this is a very heated and passionate place where we are. We're representing our constituents, and we're doing a good job. And it's our responsibility to hold Cabinet individually or collectively, to task. Unfortunately, we're not talking about deputy ministers, okay? Let's just focus on our Cabinet, our Ministers. Deputy ministers are bureaucracy. They're doing their job. They don't have that way to deal with things. So, please, be very respectful in how we do it. I appreciate the passion. I appreciate people having the ability to bring forth their concerns but we also need to be respectful of our bureaucracy and people that are not here. So just a little bit of a reminder, please and thank you.

Replies to Budget Address, 1 of 7. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS' REPLY

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate your word of wisdom. I, too, agree I want to begin by saying you're right, the individuals in the public service aren't on trial here in the sense of it's the Cabinet and their budget certainly is in the face of that and hence I wish to couch my marks around that particular thing.

So, Mr. Speaker, I did hear the budget. I'm going to say it wasn't all terrible, but -- so I want to stress that to the Finance Minister. I do know that bureaucracy works behind the scenes, you know, not days, not weeks, months and years to come up with what they do. And how do they get to where they are, and I will have some maybe -- offer perspective on that in a second, but I'll say with this: How does the government -- a lot of times the system is working behind the scenes long before, as I define it, the elected bureaucracy gets here. In other words, the train -- let's do what the bureaucracy says when it comes to this room, and we try to figure out what we want to do. The machinery behind the scenes has already been

pushing a lot of these ideas. And as my good colleague from Range Lake points out, political idealism and objectives, it really represents 6 percent of our budget. It really is frustrating from an MLA point of view who is advocating for particular issues, where my other colleague on the side highlights his concerns aren't treaty issues not being fulfilled or maybe youth issues are not being filled in a small community, it's hard to get these messages out in a way that the Cabinet doesn't take them personal or think we're being critical just because we get up in the morning, say, I can't wait to be mean; who do I get to pick today. It's the fact is a lot of times it's quite frustrating, and hopefully I'll get to that further detail given the fact that really ticks along here.

Mr. Speaker, a mandate as we all know was contrived and developed and created through the discussions as MLAs including yourself was there at the discussion, I believe. That said, then that mandate gets taken behind closed doors and, of course, then the Premier issues a status on how the mandate's going to be fulfilled and then, as we all know, we get mandate letters sent to each particular must.

Mr. Speaker, what's important, though, is I want to highlight as I get to the budget and explain it is that the mandate on a high level says we care about housing -- sorry, I should clarify. We care about a lot of things. But we're highlighting housing, health, safety, and economy as the forerunners of our biggest issues we wish to carry this time around. Well, that's when MLAs are getting frustrated. When I hear my good colleague, you know, in McPherson they don't have housing for people there, when I hear my good colleague from Tu Nedhe about the fact that they can't get people in their health centres, etcetera, like, we wonder sometimes where is the war-like effort of getting those 500 houses on the ground in our territory. When we get a briefing chaired by I think my good colleague from Monfwi, you know, we hear housing says it takes us four years to deliver 100 doors to help Northerners. When we have 325, 350 people on the waiting list here in Yellowknife, we ask ourselves are we meeting the objectives in this budget to address the housing, health, safety, economy.

We have a Premier, respectfully, who talks about being the, you know, law and order Premier bringing great -- you know, great things and helping people be safe, etcetera. And that's great. I support those things. But where is the safety initiatives? I'll say in my riding specifically we constantly have people on the street. Whether they're homeless, whether they're there for various reasons, I'm not here to diagnose that, but we have public safety issues that are real, and their alive. I got a call a few

days ago from a constituent saying they're trying to get out of the mall and they're being mobbed by certain people in certain situations. Now I'm not here, again, to diagnose every reason why these folks are here but these are real issues. We have tourists being cornered. You know, we need safety -- public safety issues.

Our economy, Mr. Speaker, I can't go on long enough, and certainly I only have 16 minutes left, but the fact is the finance Minister mentions about the GDP or the market's down in the sense of our revenues, but the truth is we know how to make money, and we also know how to save money, and we also know how to not spend money. Let's start with making money.

Let's harness the collective potential and the excitement of our mining industry. There is no shame in saying we are a mining territory. We are a resource territory. We all know, as pointed out by the Range Lake colleague here, that the fact that if we did offshore oil and gas, that would be a new diamond mine. Not maybe one. Maybe five. I don't know what the right answer is. But it's that type of excitement. We have a diamond mine saying we want to continue business for another 20 years in the North. Here's our opportunity to say yes, we can. So we have people like stories like my colleague of Frame Lake, you know, telling passionate stories about trying to -- people get ahead. It's these issues hitting the hallmarks of our mandate should be clear and simple. Every department, whether it's housing, we're going to do more housing. Health, we're going to find a way to be supportive of housing. MACA, we're going to find a way to produce land for housing. Justice, we're going to give justice for housing. Like, every Minister should be screaming housing matters. And the same so in this budget through the Finance Minister should be hitting every one of those bells. I'm doing this because we're improving the economy. I'm doing this because we're bringing more tourists and art and people are buying more arts in our community. Those are great things. But to the mining industry, Mr. Speaker, you know, when we get investment here through the mineral investment policy, what other policy do we get an 8 to 1 return? It spurs our economy.

Take my colleague as well from Range Lake. He says let's tax online gaming. It doesn't tax people locally like, say, cigarettes or property taxes or etcetera, etcetera. It taxes money that's leaving the Northwest Territories. We're bringing it back. So whether the analysis says there's \$200,000 left on the table or \$2 million left on the table -- sorry, falling off the table, I should really say, we should be innovative. If we want to be innovative, why don't we hold an economic forum through the finance Minister?

We have incredible staff and talent in that shop that know these things. We could simulate an innovation discussion through them in saying how can we help the local economics catch on fire, how can we get the capital moving, how can we get the regions moving, how can we support the communities to spur their economy. We have those types of things. These are way more smart than just a calculated risk. We have the know-how. We have people who do this. Tap into them, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as mentioned, I think earlier, NHIB, great one. It's in a mandate letter to the Minister of health. If we want to talk about more revenues for the Department of Finance, I'm supportive of that. We have two health czars. We have one we imported from Saskatchewan. We have one we have from Hay River. Two people reworking and examining the health system. NHIB is a listed issue in the mandate letter to the Minister of health. It says finalize negotiations to recoup full costs.

Mr. Speaker, we're watching money go out the door with no effort of fighting back that it belongs to us. There's opportunities everywhere, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the public service, as great as they are, including the Indigenous governments hiring up to 200 people, I think as mentioned by our finance Minister, is great. I like -- you know, government jobs are well paying jobs. That's great. I don't care where they are. Anywhere. They're excellent jobs. But we can't rely on the public service, whether in Yellowknife, whether in Behchoko, whether they're in Wrigley, to save the economy. And we know this, but we're so afraid or bashful to say to save the economy, we need an economy. And that's what's important.

Mr. Speaker, when I see things such as practically 50 percent vacancy for doctors but then I read in the budget we're putting \$5.4 million -- on page 10 by the way if anyone's looking -- for locum accommodations, is this not a signal we're doing something wrong? Is this not a flag in the air saying wait a minute, we need to ask ourselves what's going on here and how do we turn this around? This budget should be saying how do we reenforce the attitudes, perspectives, and needs, and give the much energy we can to our medical support system as possible.

We've heard from doctors. I've heard from them. My colleagues have heard from them. I mean, everybody's heard from them. I'm not sure who's not listening to them. That's the problem. When they say we need help and support in our administration, at first I didn't know what that meant. To me, it's just this

nebulous word of, oh, administration. What? You don't like to sharpen your pencils? No. It's the fact that they write these reports, and they get shut down, and then they become -- they become the administrators, clerks on their own stuff when they want to be on the frontline saying, you know, hello, ma'am, how can I help you? You brought your child in here; I'm listening. That's the issue. It becomes a -- red tape -- thank you, a red tape issue for them. They want to do more. When I see \$5.4 million added to the system but I hear doctors wanting to quit or who have quit who refuse to even think about coming back, they go, you know what, I want to manage my own schedule, don't put the \$5.4 million into accommodations for locums, that is, put it into making doctors happy who want to work. And many of them -- I'm starting to get a central theme here -- would like to go back to fee for service because they say it's way more financially in their interest. And I'm telling you as a person, as a family person, as a friend of many of my colleagues here, look, whatever it takes to get doctors. Whatever it takes.

The same could be said about nurses, Mr. Speaker, so I'm not going to repeat about that.

Mr. Speaker, we've got mines on record saying they want to be a partner in our economy. Again, another flag I wish would be highlighted in our budgets. I know the finance Minister is live to these things. I'm just worried that, you know, frankly, these things are right here. Mr. Speaker, the failed policy of \$150 million reduction times three, \$150 million, those cuts, I want to assure the public most Members -- I can't speak for all -- weren't in favour of it. Most Regular Members, that is. And Regular Members were just as surprised when it was announced by the Premier and the finance Minister a year ago. And it's no surprise we're not meeting it. The problem is is that, you know, if they don't do that, where are they going to go? You know, what's on the chopping block this time around? The question is will it be inclusive schooling next? Will it be things like midwifery that actually save us money when we can't get a doctor in a small community or other types of things? Will it be other things like that? I don't know. Mr. Speaker, we can't keep, you know, asking ourselves these questions why are people frustrated when they give us the answers and we ignore them. So I'm not sure why we do that.

Mr. Speaker, everybody tells a story. And I've mentioned earlier that our budget should be telling the story about our mineral resource innovation, our doctor innovation, our nursing innovation. Mr. Speaker, it's frustrating as a Member sitting on this side. I mean, it isn't all doom and gloom, but every time we look at

these situations, it creates tension. It creates tension with Members. It creates tension with the public. It creates tension with colleagues here in the Assembly, those who are listening, those who aren't listening. I mean, I can see it, and I can appreciate that too. But, you know, when I go outside of this building and I ask real people how do they feel, I'm curious on how they're going to feel about this budget. Do they feel inspired there's more better days ahead than behind us? I don't know yet. So do I think there's good times?

I remember good times, Mr. Speaker. And I'll preface it by saying I'm not talking about I'm so old I remember things old, old days, but I am old in my own way. I'm so old I remember looking forward to eating Pilot Biscuits and liking them. Mr. Speaker, I remember when -- I'm so old I remember when we talked about Spam and Click as the northern steak, you know, the good old days. I still have that optimism, Mr. Speaker. You know, someone will say, how are you doing, and I say I'm optimistic even when I'm not, because I want to say we need to put that energy into the conversation. We need to put that energy in the relationship of what we're doing. That's what we need in this budget. We should be talking about our optimism, the things we can do. Now I'm reworking a saying, we've all heard it before, but I don't think there's anything wrong with the NWT that cannot be fixed with what's right about the NWT. We have a lot of dedicated people in our public service. We have a lot of northern industry that wants to be the solution. We have community governments that want to be the lead partner in any of these initiatives. So when it comes down to the lack of statement in our budget saying we want to build 5 more -- 500 million -- let me try it again -- 500 more houses, the GNWT should be saying, how can we draft your proposal so you could be the lead and have better access to these initiatives? Because strong communities actually, in my view and in my experience, is strong for the territory. And if we have housing, stable housing, we have healthy people. When we have healthy people, we'll have productive people. It's not a simple formula but it's -- you know, it's not that complicated either. People need housing, and they need support.

I mean, I hear my good colleague, Mr. Nerysoo, talk often about trying to empower people and finding ways. This is exactly it. If we stabilize their living, we can encourage them to work. We can encourage them to give back. We can even encourage them to volunteer. But even the way we have our income support system right now is you don't have to do any of that once you're on it. We need people to look forward to getting up in the morning, contributing in the way that

they can. And I want to stress that, in the way they can. Not the way I'm telling them, not the way somebody from down south thinks they should by whatever standard they create, but the way they can.

As a reminder to the Cabinet, again back to sometimes we're probably frustrated or tensioned, and as I said at the beginning sometimes there's frustration about how this comes about. I won't go through how the steps of the process of the mandate. But all that develops the budget, and the budget, again, is developed by a bureaucracy over, you know, weeks, months, years, etcetera. But believe it or not, Mr. Speaker, it's hard to imagine most public -- the public doesn't really realize that MLAs get the first crack at the budget just before it's presented to the people, and then we're asked when the ink is dry, what do you think?

So on -- if I have my dates correct, on January 13th was the first sit down MLAs had to discuss the budget in its context in draft form. On January 24th, that was 24 days ago. And then just a few days after that, it had its wrap up. So less than two weeks, basically Members are given the opportunity to coalesce. It's unfortunate because I'll say without intending to insult party politics light, Cabinet presents budgets as a package. In other words, this is what we agree as Cabinet, and this is how it's going to be. But unfortunately, when it comes just two weeks ago to Members, two weeks and 24 days, that is, Members represent independent Members. We're not a party. We're a loose fit confederation that can unite on certain issues and whatnot. So when Members say there isn't enough in this budget, when it says that 6 percent isn't connecting with the communities, that's where you get the frustration because the budget practically -- the ink is well dried, decisions have been made in isolation without us. And, again, Cabinet may have been working on these initiatives for years, but it's hard to see them in the budget when Members say we want to be part of that success.

I hear frustration from constituents that the government hasn't reworked and rewritten the northern bonus, Mr. Speaker. I'm squeezing this in near the end just to make sure. And I think we're losing people, and we're getting frustration on that. What we see is when it comes to us, we're wondering is the bureaucracy telling the political machinery well, you get 6 percent to play with or 6 percent matters enough that we'll let you decide where we're going. It's the analogy that we all know of the old tail wagging the dog. And it's frustrating as an MLA when we hear the budget on these types of things. Yes, I acknowledge there are

good things, and I will acknowledge them in a way when I have more time. It just feels like it's disconnected from this side of the House. It feels disconnected in a way of saying when a community wants a community hall because that changes the community, whether they have gatherings, children play in daycare, whether it's somewhere war to go. You know, as a kid like myself growing up in a small community, we had a small community centre. It was called the friendship centre. It changed the world of young people. It kept them busy. So when we have colleagues who are asking for these things, that's why we're asking for them. It's not because we think, well, the government has too much money. As a matter of fact, we want happy people and we want to see this reflected in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, as time ticks away or in many ways, I would like to see our government reconsider a couple things. One, for instance, for example, trade subsidies. Right now, if you're a male, it's \$9 an hour. If you're a female, it's \$16 an hour. Frankly, I don't care how you get there or who does it, I'm happy we're putting this in. I want to see us fully fund trades people for their first year. Someone experienced with the industry, guys like my good colleague Mr. Edjericon, will understand that it's very expensive. It's a financial loss for anybody to stimulate -- or sorry, hire a tradesperson in their first year. We all know it's a loss. So they spend so much time and energy. This would bolster people by saying, well, wait a minute, I'm not losing as much money. They want the trades to hire. Things like that. They want to bring -- I would suggest we need to start taking a full look at our NGOs and asking them what can they do to be our partners. Whether it's in long-term care, whether it's in daycare, it doesn't matter to me. I think we need to find other ways to find this. We can put a full force on trying to attract the military. I wish that was saying in this budget because military money is good money, Mr. Speaker. Very good money. And, Mr. Speaker, I've already started to scratch together a proposal to the Premier of saying how we could create a joint committee so we can do a full, full offence on this idea. And it's not my idea. It's not a new -- it's an old one. But at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, there's more things right with the territory than wrong, and I think we can continue to harness that energy. Whether it's starting an economic committee, whether it's getting the military to invest us, we have the opportunities. We have diamond mines who want to employ people. I want to see happy, healthy people. And I hope our budget can find ways through this before we reach the end of this session.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your time. I thank my colleagues across the way for their time. I definitely thank my colleagues on my side of the House for their time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Replies to Budget Address, Day 1 of 7. Acknowledgements. Oral questions.

Colleagues, before we get into the oral questions, I want to remind you that rules have now changed as of yesterday. So it is one question and two supplementary questions, so it's not a third one. So I just want to make sure everybody's aware of that. Member from Range Lake -- or sorry, Great Slave.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 436-20(1): HEALTHCARE SUSTAINABILITY

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can wait, but thank you, I guess.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to continue the conversation around seeking more clarity on what I'm considering the big three, not infrastructure, but the big three health pieces. That would be primary care reform, health system sustainability, and the new public administrator.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please explain how the health system sustainability unit, which I realize is not hers, but how that unit and the public administrator are working together; and, if they are, what parts of their mandate overlap, if any. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the public administrator has met with the health sustainability unit leadership. Part of his role is to ensure that NTHSSA collaborates with this unit to support the government's goal of improving health services while maintaining fiscal sustainability. So I think they've met a couple of times now. The sustainability, as we all know, works with the entire health and social services system, including all three health authorities, whereas the PA's focus is solely on NTHSSA's operations. This unit, established last year, has a project charter and is progressing quickly. The PA, Mr. Florizone, appointed just before the mandatory leave in December, is currently working to analyze NTHSSA and develop a plan to meet his mandate.

While their work does overlap, their mandates differ. The sustainability unit focuses on long-term sustainability, and I won't get into that. If there's more questions on that, I would say direct them to the Premier. The PA is responsible for NTHSSA's operation. His mandate includes ensuring the efficiency, delivery of quality of health and social services, balancing the NTHSSA budget, supporting health care reform, improving recruitment and retention of health care professionals, improving staff morale, reviewing medical travel while we're working within that medical travel modernization, strengthening the governance, so looking at our governance model, and ensuring compliance and promoting cultural safety and anti-racism service delivery. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a lot for one person. Can the Minister explain what the expected outcomes of the public administrator's work will be, or put more simply, how will we know if we've been successful in tackling the significant challenges, many of which she listed just now, that he was brought in to address? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the success of the public administrator will be measured on the progress of his mandate deliverables and then also by his work plans. So once the work plan is finalized and he will be following up with me and with -- like, with the deputy minister, with the CEO. We will continue to follow that up. Once the work plan is approved, though, I will be sharing that with committee. And the success will be measured by clear improvements in the financial sustainability, operational effectiveness, and meeting some legal obligations while addressing our residents' needs. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When can we expect to see that on this side of the House? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, the PA was hired late December and so now he's doing the -- he's analyzing. So I would not expect him to come in with a work plan. I want him -- his direction was to come in, work with our administration, work with, you know, a lot of our other groups that we have work. He's met with the medical association. He will be meeting with CAN. He will be going out to the regions to meet with the CEOs and how they run their operations. And then he'll be complying what

his mandate is into his work plan. And so I'm hoping that I'll be able to share that, you know, before -- maybe a draft of where we're going with that before the end of March with committee. But I don't have a timeline exactly but as soon as we have that plan drafted, I will share that with committee. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 437-20(1):
TRAUMA, HEALING AND HARM
REDUCTION

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It feels like ages ago now, but my questions are for the health and social services Minister in follow up to my Member's statement about harm reduction.

So, first, in 2022, the GNWT released a standards manual for managed alcohol programs in the territory. Can the Minister confirm whether these standards are actually in use anywhere in the territory now? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, these standards are in use by any GNWT-funded managed alcohol program and at this time, the only one that's being funded is through the Spruce Bough in Yellowknife. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So what has the GNWT done to reach out to partners, such as Indigenous governments or non-profit shelter providers, to discuss whether or how managed alcohol programs could be newly established in other NWT communities or strengthened here in Yellowknife? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at this time, there is no sustainable funding for the existing managed alcohol program at Spruce Bough. The priority would be to secure a sustainable funding for that program before looking at expansion. It should be noted that expansion will require new resources. One of the things that, you know, even as a Regular Member before during COVID, many of the Indigenous governments and Indigenous population, you know, I think this is -- you know, we have to understand and we have to be able to work with individual NGOs, different communities, and what their comfort level is on providing these types of

programs outside to other NGOs. I know that there was concern by groups that, you know, providing alcohol to our residents when we -- you know, so the understanding and the process and the how-to work within that program, there's still work to do, but like I said it is -- there is no funding, any new resources for it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, has the GNWT examined the feasibility of ensuring there's a day shelter space where people could more safely use drugs or prescribed drug alternatives such as methadone or gabapentin? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, currently, the health and social system is not planning on establishing any type of supervised consumption sites for drugs. We are focused on public health messaging, treatment options. There has been funding provided to use towards distributing and training of community members, naloxone kits. Fentanyl testing strips are also distributed. We also have an existing territorial opioid recovery provided that provides oversight for residents receiving opioid maintenance therapy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 438-20(1):
LAND TRANSFERS TO MUNICIPALITIES

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, following up on my Member's statement, advancing land devolution to our communities, my questions are for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Minister, would you commit to working with communities to begin the process of transferring authority over all territorial and Commissioner's lands within community boundaries ensuring they have full control and decision-making powers over those lands? Thank you.

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

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the department is committed to working with all communities interested in bulk land transfers. To this regard, currently we've received one request from the

city of Yellowknife regarding a bulk land transfer and currently the department is working with the city on their request. As part of our daily operations, ECC land management and administration works directly with the communities on individual transfer requests. And currently the division is working on over 152 applications that are in the system. And of those, 98 have passed through the consultation phase and are in the final stages of approval. So to be clear, you know, the communities require development plans, bylaws, and surveys. This is part of the requirement to fulfill those land transfers to a community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. And I understand that, you know, some of -- I know at least one community has put forward a request to have a transfer of lands. And I guess what we're talking about is transferring -- and I understand there's survey work will be required to be done there, but transferring as one block. And I guess what I'm looking for is can the Minister kind of commit to kind of a clear timeline to developing kind of an action plan to transfer these controls, and is that being worked on right now? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes, the discussions around bulk land transfer and the transfer of land in general has been a topic that's been top of mind of my own personally for quite a while, and we've had many discussions with our partners across the territory through ICGS protocol. And as we look at those, we have to take into consideration that this process has multiple pieces of legislation that come into play here, and we have to always take into consideration the requirement for proper consultation in this process as well. So the work is ongoing, and certainly happy to have that conversation with any communities that are interested in pursuing that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister for Environment and Climate Change. Final supplementary. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister. And, you know, and I appreciate that and, as the Minister's aware, there is a cost oftentimes, particularly for smaller communities when they're looking to transfer this land, if there's any survey work that is required to be done. But will the Minister commit, as part of their engagement plan with communities through outreach, to look at covering some of that cost or assisting with that cost to get this land surveyed so it can be transferred? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd certainly be happy to engage with any of the communities that are interested in advancing this process on, you know, a bulk land transfer and certainly more than open to having the officials from the specific communities or multiple communities come and have that discussion with the department on the options that are available to us within the current guidelines and legislation that we have to follow and always, you know, interested in having the bigger conversation about what we could potentially look at doing going forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 439-20(1):
RESPITE AND HOME CARE IN DEHCHO
COMMUNITIES

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These questions are for the Minister of health.

Mr. Speaker, in the past we have heard about paramedics assisting at NWT health centres to help with staff shortages. Can the Minister advise if similar initiatives are being looked at to address the lack of first responders and after hour care in the communities in my riding of Kakisa, Fort Providence, Enterprise, and Hay River Reserve. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what I can say is, yes, paramedics have been used in circumstances where there hasn't been any -- enough nurses available, community health nurses available in some of the health centres. When there's a shortage and they've expanded all ways to try and recruit, even locums, they reached out and they have paramedics that go in. The paramedics, however, are there used to assist nurses to do assessments in triage so that frees up the community health nurse in the health centre. They don't work on call, and they don't work alone. And while they're working in the health centre in that role, they don't -- they're not working outside of the health centre in any -- like, in a paramedic capacity. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is it possible to staff -- is it possible to have an extended program to have home care workers work after hours to assist elders or people with disabilities in my riding? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, right now we have started to transition, and during the last year, we actually have increased some communities with the funding that we're getting through the home -- Inuit home and community and funding that we have within to start to provide after hours and weekend support to those home care clients by home support workers that are hired locally in the community. I have asked the department to do a review of actually the Member's riding to see when was the last time home care assessments were done in her riding. I know that across the territory we've had this conversation -- I've had the conversation with the Member that, you know, as we expand these programs, we have to make sure we're expanding into the communities that have the greatest needs with -- like, when we are doing that. So I have asked to make sure that all of our home care assessments throughout our regions are going to be -- like, going to be up to date so that way if we -- when we are able to start expanding into other communities that we're using the -- we're putting the extra hours into those communities that have been assessed to need that. So I have committed to the Member that I will be doing that in -- making sure because that was the request that she asked, my riding, but I will, however, make sure that, you know, all our small communities are making sure that they have the care that they need, and as we roll out this we will continue to look at where they need to go. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister for Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Member from Deh Cho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister explain which home and community care services are currently offered in my riding, the communities in my riding?

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what I do have, I have the -- there is a home care nurse and two home support workers that are located in Fort Providence. They do report to the nurse -- the home care nurse in-charge from the Deh Cho out of Simpson. I will have to get back to the Member on the other three communities that she serves. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 440-20(1):
2025 SAHTU WINTER ROAD RESUPPLY

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my four questions today is to the

Minister of Infrastructure on the Sahtu winter road resupply and public safety, to some degree, survival.

My first question to the Minister of Infrastructure is how is it the Department of Infrastructure monitoring this heavy traffic north of Fort Wrigley? Mahsi.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, monitoring and planning, really, for the monitoring began back, I would actually say last year. We obviously went through a difficult resupply last year and had to develop pretty good connections with the trucking community, with those on the other end on the receiving on the supply side. It went well. And starting this summer and through the fall, we rekindled those connections. So the monitoring is happening both by our staff as well as by making sure we have those contacts. We have extra folks on the entire stretch of winter road in order to make sure that we are keeping an eye on what is happening, and also we're monitoring the number of fuel trucks and trucks of all sorts that are going on the road starting all the way from Enterprise and, again, going all the way through for the entire network. Thank you.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the Minister for that information here. My next question: Will the Minister make available weekly fuel delivery schedules? I've got that report coming from Imperial so if I can monitor for myself interest of the scheduled deliveries. Mahsi.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I receive a regular weekly report on what's been delivered, and I'm more than happy to make sure I do try to send that out to MLAs but I will, again, certainly make my best efforts to do that now.

As far as the schedule of deliveries, I'm certainly quite happy to ask that the department try to do that. I also am receiving the one from Imperial. With respect to the ones from fuel services division, the same folks typically that are actually doing the resupply would then be the ones having to issue out the schedule so there, at times, might be some delays getting that out but certainly happy to make some best efforts in that regard so people can plan their travel accordingly. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplementary. Member from Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: I really want to thank the Minister for providing those measures. This

window is going to close in another seven weeks, so we got to make sure that we have the schedule and monitor the schedule. My last question here will be, to the Minister, provide advanced notices to my office and the public travellers for the transportation of the Colville Lake school wide dimensional loads. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. That will be your final supplementary question. Minister of Finance -- or Infrastructure. Same.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I am very closely watching this, as is my colleague Minister Cleveland, and we'll be more than happy to provide notice to the MLA and will then also have it up on social media so the public knows when it's happening. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 441-20(1):

SERVICES AT PRIMARY HEALTH CLINICS

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I cited in my Member's statement regarding health privacy concerns at the clinic, and so I'm going to ask the Minister what can she do to investigate, access, address, and follow up to people like myself, MLAs that is, what action can and will be taken to address these issues so inadvertently personal private information is not being shared? Thank you.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd have to get more specifics from the Member, and I'm willing to have that conversation with him to figure out what the issue is and what's being -- the breach is, if there is a breach. I mean, we have stringent, like rules around sharing of private information, of health information. So I would further like to discuss this with the Member, and we can deal with it in the appropriate channels. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, I may have used the word "breach." I'd have to go back to transcript. It wasn't -- no, no, but I want to be clear just for the mere second of grace you'll allow me. It's not a breach when two people are talking and people are listening as in a nefarious breach; it could just be shared inadvertently hence that's the breach per se, in that -- so if CBC's listening, you're not getting a fax.

Mr. Speaker, in my Member's statement, I also cited the fact that there are line-ups at 7:30 when the doors open for those few precious appointments, and they're gone moments later, and then we have tons of people waiting in line behind them for those on the spot, same-day appointments, and the phone lines open at shortly past 8 and they're long gone. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister explain to this House what is the key issue underpinning the refusal to create an online booking system like there are so many out there already, and will she direct her department to find a workaround so we can become efficient and modern? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, the proposed online booking system, this is -- NTHSSA is aware that the department within NTHSSA has added this to their intake process for IT projects, and that's triage based on the funding and need and so we are currently, as you know, having a very huge deficit of IT infrastructure. So I will make sure I figure out if there is a timeline or if this is going to move forward and how much this is, and I can report back to the Member with any of that information once I have it. Thank you.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I look forward to that answer from the Minister.

Mr. Speaker, in my Member's statement I also cited that there are issues with the phone system where people will leave messages, and the message online, whether you're calling the hospital to a specialist section, whether it's, you know, ultrasound, etcetera, or the clinics, etcetera, is you will get a callback between two and three days, so Mr. Speaker, if the -- maybe the Premier's trying to draw the attention of the House. I thought I was being interrupted there. Did you want something, Mr. Premier? Oh, maybe not.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Minister is what can she do to either accelerate the return call process or make sure someone's live to take these calls that keep coming in because people are frustrated they either don't get a call or never hear from them, period. I guess that's the same thing. She understands the issue. Thank you.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, the short answer is NorthwesTel and TSC are working together to trial a new system right now currently. Software and equipment have been procured. Staff are in training. And this will be tested within the next couple weeks, and then the trial -- live trial is expected sometime this month for that system to be ready. So I'm hoping that this will work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Great answer. Got everybody happy. That's good to hear.

Oral questions. Member from Monfwi.

QUESTION 442-20(1):
PUBLIC SAFETY AND RCMP SUPPORT

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a question for the Minister of Justice.

On October 21, 2024, the Minister mentioned introducing new legislation that is intended to help the communities and RCMP address these impacts. Can the Minister advise the House if this legislation is ready, and if not, can the Minister provide a timeline for when it will be introduced? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Two questions in one there. Minister of Justice.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And the Member is correct, I have announced that we are looking to introduce three pieces of legislation to help with public safety. So the first is the SCAN legislation, and that stands for safer communities and neighbourhoods. And that's the type of legislation that allows for buildings to be temporarily shut down and if there's residents there, those residents would have to find somewhere else to go if those buildings are causing harm to a community and that can be proven on a balance of probabilities in court. So it bypasses the Residential Tenancies Act and the criminal justice system. And so this is a system that is used in jurisdictions across Canada and has been effective at shutting down drug houses. So this is one tool that I want to provide to communities.

We also have the Trespass Act. And I've heard from a number of MLAs, and I've heard from, you know, my own constituents, that there are some apartment buildings that have unwanted drug dealers in them, and they just can't get them out. And so this would allow, in those instances, for those individuals to be removed

and make those apartment buildings and the families in them safer.

And the other piece of legislation is civil forfeiture legislation. And sometimes if the RCMP arrest someone with a stack of drugs and a stack of money but there's no conviction, they have to give that money back. Civil forfeiture legislation would allow the RCMP to apply to the courts to prove -- and if they can prove on a balance of possibilities that that money was gotten through criminal activity, then they can retain those funds. They can do the same thing for vehicles and houses and other assets as well.

So the idea behind these pieces of legislation is to make the Northwest Territories a less inviting place for drug dealers to do business. We want to make it a miserable place for drug dealers to do business. SCAN legislation is under -- there's still research happening. This spring, we hope to go out for public engagement, maybe have a legislative proposal later this year. I understand this is a controversial piece of legislation. It has been in the past. And so there might be some movement in those timelines there because we want to make sure we get the support and get it right. And the other pieces of legislation are likewise expected to be completed and hopefully have the bills passed during the life of this Assembly. Thank you.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you for the answer. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my statement, safe residents and communities has been a priority of this Assembly. What actions are the Minister and the department taking to address the priority in light of recent drug and gun related crimes in the NWT? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Minister of Justice, I provide the RCMP with their policing priorities. Priority number 1 is to address the impacts of drugs and alcohol on our communities, so illegal drugs and bootlegging on our communities. That's my first priority that I've given to the RCMP. So that's step one.

In this fiscal year, we funded a new crime reduction unit to be made up of RCMP officers who are going to focus on organized crime and drugs. They'll have the time and the specialized training to undertake investigations and hopefully -- well, not hopefully. They're going to make a dent in the drug trade in the territory. We've also funded additional officers for the emergency response team to help that crime reduction unit go kick in doors when it's necessary. There have been officers added,

regular duty officers added around the territory every year for the last number of years. We are also on the other end looking at providing supports for individuals who are released from jail or need to navigate the justice system to hopefully stay out of the justice system. We have a number of programs like this rolling out, and I look forward to discussing these more in the coming weeks and months. Thank you.

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

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister commit to investigate whether the Behchoko RCMP detachment need more resources or personnel to continue traffic stops and combat the problem we are facing? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe it was in the last fiscal year there were two positions added to the detachment in Behchoko. Last year -- this fiscal year I think there was one in Whati, and next year there's another one. And so there's a number of positions going into the Tlicho region. What we -- the way we work with the RCMP is that they identify the pressures in different communities, and we work with them to resource them as necessary. And so there are pressures around the territory, but we have recognized those in the Tlicho region and responded.

The RCMP have also implemented their new divisional drug strategy across the territory. And that's part of the reason why you see in the news more check stops resulting in drug seizures. It's because the RCMP are -- they have taken a different approach in the last maybe year and a half, and it's paying dividends, and we see it in the news with these regular drug busts. And this is -- we all take this issue seriously. We've heard it throughout the House today. You know, every -- the last few years, I think the coroner reported around six or seven deaths because of toxic overdoses. But that's not the end of it. There's also more deaths associated with the drug trade. There's murders, there's executions, there's suicide, there's human trafficking. So we recognize the weight of this issue, and we are responding. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 443-20(1):
FAST-TRACKING CRITICAL MINERALS
PROJECTS

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, recently the BC Premier Eby has announced that he is fast-tracking 18 resource projects in his province, a blend of energy, mining, and critical minerals projects worth around \$20 billion and that will employ 8,000 people. There are certainly some people who have issue with the fast-tracking, but he is committed to do it to deal with the trade war. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are still very much in the midst of a trade war. It's time to fast-track some of our own projects. We have nine advanced critical minerals projects or a mix of projects that could help our critical minerals future. Can the Minister of Environment and Climate Change commit to fast-tracking these nine projects? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that is a fact that there are many projects that are advanced and ready to move on. Unfortunately, the GNWT is unable to unilaterally make the decision to advance projects in that manner. The department is committed to working with our co-management partners, and we have a very robust co-management system. And for us to streamline that process and -- you know, without proper consultation and without ensuring that we're talking with the Indigenous governments and the Indigenous organizations would really, you know, not follow the commitment of this government to work closely with those groups and ensure that the process is moving forward.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I have been working closely with ITI, and we recently were at Roundup. We've had multiple meetings with industry, and we are discussing ways to find quicker paths forward with regards to the regulation and the permitting process, and that work has been ongoing for almost a year now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to be clear, I don't want to circumvent the rights of Indigenous people; that's certainly not what I'm suggesting. I'm suggesting let's work together to fast track these projects.

Will the Minister bring this concern to the Council of Leaders' table or work with the Premier -- I don't know that process -- but will he get this on the agenda at the Council of Leaders so everyone can work together to fast-track these projects for the sake of our -- every community in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it certainly has been a regulation and land use etcetera have been a topic of -- a common topic with the Council of Leaders and at that table, and, you know, as we work forward together to try and address some of the challenges of fast tracking, if we want to call it that, but, you know, moving the regulatory process at a quicker pace, it certainly involves a lot of communication and ensuring that we have, you know -- we have the Intergovernmental Council legislative developmental process that we use to do this work, and I think it's really important that we work together through that process to find ways through a collaborative effort to move things at a quicker pace. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To be clear, regulatory streamlining is something I support, but this is an emergency situation. Will the Minister work with the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment and the Premier's office, declare a state of urgency at least over the regulatory regime and work with the relevant parties, whether they be federal, Indigenous, to ensure that we could fast-track these nine projects and get these critical -- get our critical minerals out of the ground, into market, and create good jobs in the communities? Thank you.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, I've been working closely with the Minister of ITI and industry, you know, and as well as the land and water boards and the different regulatory agencies across the territory. And certainly, it's been -- you know, the potential closing of the diamond mines in the next number of years and, you know, the interest from industry to advance their projects in a timely way has certainly been top of mind. You know, those conversations happen not just with the two of us, but it's an all-of-Cabinet approach and we're all involved in those conversations. So I'm certainly happy to continue those conversations amongst my colleagues. And, you know, as we look at the potential tariffs and some of the decisions that are going to come in the days to come to see what we can do together to advance that potential. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 444-20(1):
ON-THE-LAND HEALING CAMP INITIATIVE

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my next set of questions are actually for the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

So last fall, the government responded to the challenge of encampments popping up around Yellowknife by establishing an on-the-land camp for those who didn't have access to a home in Yellowknife. But the camp required participants to be sober in order to be there. Can the Minister explain whether the camp did actually consistently reach its maximum capacity, and if not, whether that requirement for sobriety prevented the camp from including all those who really did need a home during that time? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The camp did not reach its maximum capacity continuously. I don't believe it reached its maximum capacity ever, actually. But it did not prevent people who needed a home from having a home because there was still -- I know the Member asked about a home but there was shelter space available in Yellowknife, and so there was always shelter space available even for those who could not go to the on-the-land camp. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So has the government worked with partners to look at the feasibility of establishing an on-the-land camp for the under-housed population that would not require sobriety? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we are expecting the report back from the camp operator in the coming weeks, so we'll have a look at that and see what it says.

I will note that a number of the participants at the camp appreciated that it was a sober camp, and that helped them in their journey. So I think that's something that we need to consider, is that there are spaces if you -- you know, you aren't sober, but there really wasn't a lot available if you were, and so this offered people that opportunity. There is going to be a working -- there's going to be meetings coming up in March with the city and with NGOs to look at other options going forward and determine what is needed and what we can do together. And so options like the Member is speaking about could be raised there. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Premier. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that. I look forward to outcomes of those further discussions. So some shelter providers in Yellowknife are looking to establish better working relationships with Indigenous governments, both to explore what further supports could be offered to shelter users who are members of those communities but also to explore is the potential for establishing on-the-land camps for shelter users. So what steps has EIA taken to help facilitate those kinds of partnerships between Indigenous governments and shelter providers in Yellowknife given that it's quite well placed to do so? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I also think the NGOs in Yellowknife are well placed to reach out to the Indigenous governments. We can provide phone numbers, contact information, and they can make those connections themselves. What is needed is alignment between the NGOs and between the Indigenous governments so that they can actually work together. And so once we have all of these discussions, there might be opportunities to put together an Indigenous government with an NGO as in try to get them together. But it's really not up to the GNWT to do that type of work. I think the NGOs are more than capable. They have connections with the Indigenous governments. Many of them are made up of members of the local, you know, Indigenous government. So I think there's opportunities for this to happen without GNWT intervention, but we're happy to help where we can. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 445-20(1):
MODERNIZATION OF DISASTER
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE ARRANGEMENTS
PROGRAM

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's been a modernization of the federal disaster financial assistance arrangements known as DFAA. The Northwest Territories has -- well, you yourself, Mr. Speaker, in a different role understand this program very well. This modernization is supposed to improve how money flows to jurisdictions, especially when they face climate change induced emergencies. Can the Minister responsible for emergency preparedness through Municipal and Community Affairs give us an update as to how this is going to help our ability to respond more quickly to emergencies? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

HON. VINCE McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Member's probably aware, the program is a federal program and we adopt it or utilize it in order to get funds back from the federal government during an emergency. So some of the changes that have happened in the new update, they have the new strategic investment. This increases funding for disaster mitigation, building back better to minimize impacts and future risks; the risk reduction incentives, encouraging pre-disaster planning; hazard awareness to proactively reduce disaster impacts; also has expanded supports, more help for people experiencing significant disaster impacts, and more efficient administration. So these are just some of the changes that are in the new DFAA that's supposed to be rolling out and effective April 1st. We're still opening the books essentially, if you will, and hopefully by April 1st, we'll have a better handle on what it fully entails. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister mentioned improved support programs for individuals impacted by disaster. I still -- he's aware I still have constituents who are at significant financial hardship as a result of this owing thousands of dollars. Are these changes going to help my constituents recoup their losses from the evacuation in 2023? Thank you.

HON. VINCE McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think there was a lot of hardship through the territories with the disasters in no particular riding. I think there was a lot of impacts to people's livelihoods. And, you know, we've all worked through them. The government's worked through them and trying to get federal funding to these impacted residents. However, this new DFAA is starting off April 1st. It is not retroactive and doesn't cover off any previous emergencies. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs is sitting on funding that it lapsed for disaster relief. Can the Minister explain why that funding that's been received is still with the department and not being sent to communities or individuals who are affected by disaster? Thank you.

HON. VINCE McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not aware of any funding that we're sitting on. The money that is approved or that has been sent to us is for estimated disaster costs through what the department has received through the estimates. And that

covers off emergency or any expense claims that are eligible through the DFAA. So those claims are being put through and as part of the cycle, we have to account for all that money is being processed. So as far as I'm aware, we're not sitting on any money. This is money that's all accounted for and being transferred to impacted residents. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Oral questions. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills. Reports of Standing and Special Committees. Tabling of documents. Minister of Finance.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 275-20(1):
2025-2026 MAIN ESTIMATES

TABLED DOCUMENT 276-20(1):
2025-2026 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following two documents: 2025-2026 Main Estimates and 2025-2026 Business Plan Update. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. Tabling of documents. Minister responsible for Status of Women.

TABLED DOCUMENT 277-20(1):
STATUS OF WOMEN COUNCIL OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES 2023-2024
ANNUAL REPORT

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: Status of Women Council of the Northwest Territories 2023-2024 Annual Report. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for Status of Women. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. 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, Tabled Document 275-20(1), with the Member from the Sahtu sitting in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 275-20(1), Main Estimates 2025-2026. We will

now consider the Legislative Assembly. Does the Speaker have any opening comments?

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Yes, I do. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am pleased to present the 2025-2026 Main Estimates for the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly.

The proposed budget for the 2025-2026 is an expenditure of \$25.446 million, revenue of \$15,000 and infrastructure investments of \$500,000. The budget of \$25.446 million reflects a decrease of \$1.5 million. The operations expenditure of \$25.446 million, reflects a decrease of \$1.5 million (6 percent) compared to the 2024-2025 Budget.

This reduction is primarily attributed to the total decrease of \$1.98 million in pension contributions which includes a shift to a flat-rate contribution of \$883,000, down from \$1.84 million for the year 2025-2026 to 2028-2029; and, a reduction in pension expenditures of \$1.027 million, largely driven by an increase in the discount rate from 3.7 percent to 4.4 percent, as projected for the years 2025 to 2029 resulting in reduced pension expenses.

The overall budget takes a conservative approach to prioritizing fiscal responsibilities. This involves strategic service consolidations and capitalizing on favorable pension returns to optimize funding.

Key budget increases are limited to essential areas specifically to account for collective bargaining obligations and other high-priority initiatives. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Do you wish to bring witnesses into the house?

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Agreed. Thank you. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witnesses into the chamber.

Would the Speaker please introduce his witnesses.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On my left is Glen Rutland, clerk of the Legislative Assembly. On my right -- and I apologize if I say his last name wrong -- Alex Mulooki, acting deputy clerk, Member and precinct services.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The committee has agreed to

forego general comments on the Legislative Assembly. Does committee agree to proceed to the detail contained in the tabled document?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you. Committee, we will differ the legislative summary and review the estimates by activity summary beginning with expenditures on behalf of the Members starting on page 8. Are there any questions? The Member from Frame Lake, please proceed.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't actually have any questions. I just have a quick comment, and I just wanted to compliment the Speaker and the clerk on a good job following a fiscally responsible budget. I know that, you know, the Speaker got hit with a meme or two on our favorite Yellowknife memes page but nevertheless managed to pull out a fiscally responsible budget, and I'm happy to see it. I don't have any questions for the Speaker or his staff. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you to the Member from Frame Lake. Any further questions, comments? No further questions. Please proceed to page 9.

Legislative Assembly expenditures on behalf of the Members, operational expenditures summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$8,787,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you. Moving on to the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer beginning on page 10 with an information item on page 12. Are there any questions? Seeing none, no further questions, please proceed to page 11.

Legislative Assembly, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, operations expenditures summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$622,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you. Moving on to the Office of the Clerk beginning on page 13 with information items on page 15. Are there any questions? Seeing none, no further questions, please turn to page 14.

Legislative Assembly, Office of the Clerk, operations expenditures summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$11,365,000.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you. Moving on to the Office of the Speaker beginning on page 16 with information items on page 18. Are there any questions? Seeing none, no further questions, please turn to page 17.

The Legislative Assembly, Office of the Speaker, operations expenditures summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$564,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, committee. Moving on to statutory officers beginning on page 19 with information items on pages 22 and 23. Are there any questions? Seeing none, no further questions, please turn to page 20.

The Legislative Assembly, statutory offices, operations expenditures summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$4,108,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Agreed. Thank you, Members. Please turn now to the Legislative Assembly summary found on page 5 with revenue summary information on item page number 6. Are there any questions? Seeing none, no further questions, committee, I will now call the Legislative Assembly summary.

Legislative Assembly, operations expenditures, total Legislative Assembly, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$25,446,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the witnesses for appearing before us. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witnesses from the chamber. Mahsi.

What are the wishes of committee? Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

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

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): Okay, mahsi. The motion is in order. The motion is non-debatable. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? Seeing none, the motion is carried.

---Carried

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): I will now rise and report progress. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Report of Committee of the Whole. Member for the Sahtu.

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, your hardworking committee has been considering Tabled Document 275-20(1), and I would like to report progress with zero motions carried. And Mr. Speaker, I move that the Report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with.

MR. SPEAKER: Do I have a seconder? Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. All those in favour? Opposed?

All those in favour? Thank you. All those opposed? Abstentions? The motion is carried.

---Carried

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

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland): Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Friday, February 7th, 2025, 10 a.m.

1. Prayer or Reflection
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Replies to the Budget Address (Day 2 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
18. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
19. First Reading of Bills
 - Bill 17: Municipal and Community Affairs Statutes Amendment Act
 - Bill 18: An Act to Amend the Partnership and Business Names Act
20. Second Reading of Bills
21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Tabled Document 275-20(1): 2025-2026 Main Estimates
22. Report of Committee of the Whole
23. Third Reading of Bills
24. Orders of the Day

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Friday, February 7th, 2025, at 10 a.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 6:37 p.m.

