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**LEGISLATIVE  
ASSEMBLY**

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**The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker**

# Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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(Nahendeh)

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**YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES****Monday, February 10, 2025****Members Present**

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

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

**Prayer**

---Prayer

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

Please be seated. I'd like to thank Mary Jane Cazon for the opening prayer and reflections.

Colleagues, before I go into our day session, I have to do something that happens every February 10th. I get to embarrass two of my daughters, Debra and Nancy, who were born at actually 9:24 and 9:25 at night, but. We're a little bit early so I'd like to wish them a very happy birthday as well Edna and Deb Stipdonk, friends of mine.

Ministers' statements. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

**Ministers' Statements****MINISTER'S STATEMENT 90-20(1):  
TSIIGEHTCHIC HAMLET ESTABLISHED**

**HON. VINCE MCKAY:** Drin Gwiinzii, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the establishment of the hamlet of Tsiigehtchic. The new hamlet's first mayor and council were sworn in on January 15, 2025, marking a significant milestone for the community of Tsiigehtchic and the Northwest Territories.

Tsiigehtchic is a community with rich cultural heritage, deeply connected to the Gwich'in people and their traditional lands. The journey to become a hamlet has been a long one, beginning in 2019 when the residents initiated a petition seeking a change from a chartered community status. This led to the consultation with local leadership, the Gwich'in Tribal Council, and other partners.

In May 2023, an impressive 74 percent of residents cast their votes with 76 percent expressing support for the transition. This remarkable level of engagement underscores not only the community's strong investment in their decision but also the significance of the milestone for residents of their shared future.

In July 2024 the hamlet was established, and in December 2024 they had their first hamlet election.

I extend congratulations to the newly elected mayor and council --

- Mayor Shawn James Roland VanLoon, and councillors:
- James Andre;
- Davina Benoit-Cardinal;
- Charlene Blake;
- Dinah Blake;
- George Naditchie;
- Peter Ross;
- Shalene Shae; and,
- Brian Smith

-- have stepped forward to lead their community in this new chapter.

Becoming a hamlet is a significant step forward for Tsiigehtchic. It separates band governance from community governance, granting greater autonomy, and enabling the newly elected council to better address local needs. This structure empowers the

community government to make decisions that directly improve the lives of residents. This achievement reflects the strong collaboration between the local leaders, the residents of Tsiigehtchic, and the Government of the Northwest Territories. Together, we have worked toward a shared vision of a thriving and sustainable community.

Mr. Speaker, this transition represents the leadership and determination of Tsiigehtchic residents and aligns with the Government of the Northwest Territories broader goals of supporting community development, fostering self-determination, and strengthening local leadership. It reaffirms the 20th Legislative Assembly's commitment to good governance and collaboration with Indigenous governments, communities, and the public.

I would like to thank everyone involved in making this transition a reality. Their dedication and hard work have been instrumental in reaching this milestone. I also want to acknowledge Mr. Grant Scott, the municipal administrator, for his leadership throughout the transition process. His commitment has been invaluable, and we wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

Our government will continue to support the hamlet of Tsiigehtchic ensuring it has the resources to deliver quality programs and services to its residents. This includes a two-day orientation training program for the new councillors to guide them in their roles and responsibilities.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the collective effort and vision of Tsiigehtchic residents and leaders whose commitment has been instrumental in achieving this transition. As we move forward, I am confident that Tsiigehtchic will continue to thrive and build on its many opportunities, fostering a future full of promise. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

### Members' Statements

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT 463-20(1): NORTHWEST TERRITORIES POWER CORPORATION RESPONSE TO POWER OUTAGE IN FORT RESOLUTION

**MR. EDJERICON:** Mr. Speaker, on January 11th, 2025, at 12:45 p.m., the power went out 14 hours in the community of Fort Resolution and in minus 28 below weather. NTPC made no public announcement in the community on social media. An NTPC technician drove into town, and they were advised not to proceed by local leaders due to extreme cold weather at the time. NTPC ignored the cold weather advice and proceeded to replace one power generator unit. An NTPC technician replaced the generator and later found other issues related to power lines in the community. NTPC called for additional contractors' support from Yellowknife to help restore the power in the community, and the power was later restored around 4:30 a.m. on January 12th, 2025 - 14 hours later. There was some confusion about the warming centre, and NTPC posted on social media that afternoon that Deninu Kue School would be designated as a warming shelter, but the school was locked down when residents went there to the school to keep warm. It was later posted that the elders' facility in the

community will be the new designated warming centre for the residents in the community.

Mr. Speaker, the community residents of Fort Resolution were very concerned about their homes freezing up in the minus 28 weather and causing significant damage to their homes with potential frozen toilets, frozen water lines, frozen tanks, pressure pumps, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, the Taltson Hydro Dam has been offline for almost two years, and the community of Fort Resolution had no choice to rely on its backup diesel generator in the interim. NTPC confirmed that the Taltson hydro will be back online in mid-February 2025, and that's welcome news for the community of Fort Resolution. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Minister at the appropriate time. Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Members' Statements. Member from Range Lake.

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT 464-20(1): STATE OF THE TERRITORIAL HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

**MR. TESTART:** Mr. Speaker, well over a year ago we were elected to this Assembly to take drastic action to improve the state of our territory's health care. Shortly thereafter, Members convened and put together a list of urgent priorities in which access to health care took top billing. Now, a year later, meaningful progress on improving our health care services remains to be seen. Our constituents have made it clear they do not want to hear about the process and procedures that go on in this Assembly or in the authority any longer; they want action on health care. I don't blame them; I want action too.

When we learned that the Minister of Health and Social Services was dissolving the health leadership council to appoint a public administrator, it looked like serious action was finally being taken. Naturally, my constituents then want to know what new tools this public administrator brought to the table and to what effect those tools were going to be used to change their lives for the better. They see this Minister with a new toolbox. They want to see her pull out the policies right away to get their vital services back into shape. Yet now, we are asked -- left asking the same questions months after -- or two months after these changes were made, Mr. Speaker.

While we know the Minister has even more power to act divisively under the public administrator, we don't yet know what that administrator will do differently than the preceding health leadership council. We

haven't seen the plan this public administrator's working on to fix the state of our health care system, and we don't know when the Minister intends to have this plan put into action. The Minister praised the work of the previous leadership council yet replaced them in favour of a public administrator. So what tools do the council not have at their disposal that the Minister is now able to wield through the administrator?

Mr. Speaker, drastic changes in leadership have taken place. Now we need to see a serious plan. My constituents can't wait any longer for family doctors and can't keep showing up at emergency rooms for basic care. Frontline workers meanwhile are sharing serious concerns of potential budget cuts that seem to confirm our fear that sustainability may be a code for austerity. I full confidence in the public administrator's resume but we need to see how the Minister intends to utilize his skills through a detailed strategy that is focused on improving access to quality health care that is the right of all Northerners. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 465-20(1):  
INUVIK CURLING TEAM SUCCESS

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this weekend I had the opportunity to attend the curling Northwest Territories Rock the Rings 2025, and, Mr. Speaker, it was the biggest one yet. 65 youth curlers - 31 from Inuvik, 12 from Hay River, and 22 from Yellowknife - had attended this event this weekend over Saturday and Sunday.

Each year, Mr. Speaker, it's great to see the skill level of these curlers improving. In addition to the curling, the participants enjoyed bowling and pizza on Friday, swimming and teen time on Saturday and, most of all, Mr. Speaker, making new friends.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that Inuvik swept all three divisions this year, and I would like to recognize the following teams:

- The winners of U12 division were Tyler Bain, Emerson Steffer, and Evan Cockney, they were coached by Tamara Bain and Pearl Gillis;
- The U15 division champions, Mr. Speaker, were Jacob Robertson, Adikas Wilcom, and Jett Etter, coached by Mark Robertson; and,

- The U20 division winners were Reece Wainman, Brooke Smith, Jasper Wilcom, and Tamara Bain, and they were coached by Nick Saturnino.

Nick Saturnino was also the president of the Inuvik Curling Club and now the president of the Northwest Territories Curling Association. Nick works tirelessly, as some of you may know in this House, working with youth in not only curling but all sports to grow youth participation in sports across the territory.

Mr. Speaker, Yellowknife does an amazing job hosting this event. This is, I think, the -- I remember the 4th year in a row they put it down here, which has just been amazing. Many thanks to the Yellowknife Curling Club and their team of volunteers. Michelle White and Carla Skogi for entertaining, feeding, the athletes and chaperons, and taking care of the spectators upstairs. Ed Saddleburger for six great sheets of ice all weekend. And a thank you to Janey Hobart for officiating and keeping everyone organized and on time. And lastly, a big thank you to the Northwest Territories curling nation for making this into the event it's become today. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 466-20(1):  
PROMOTING INDIGENOUS  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Masi, Mr. Speaker. Today I am going to be talking about promoting entrepreneurship in the NWT. Mr. Speaker, quote, the Indigenous economy is about to take off. Mr. Speaker, this is according to a MacLean article from December 2024.

It is estimated that the potential value of the Indigenous economy in Canada is more than \$100 billion. This is great news for the Indigenous population and businesses who, for far too long, were isolated from financial opportunities and success.

Mr. Speaker, a strong economic foundation is a priority of this Assembly. The Government of the Northwest Territories should promote entrepreneurship in our communities. I would like to know what the government is doing to prepare our young people to be entrepreneurs and to run businesses.

There are many constituents in my riding with ideas for small businesses, but they encounter roadblocks or need help with startup. They need guidance. Mr. Speaker, I do not want to

see these ideas waste away. I do not want to see these opportunities lost. I would like to be assured that the Indigenous economy is about to take off here in the NWT as well and ensure that we are not missing out on what is expected elsewhere in Canada. I will have questions for the Minister of ITI at the appropriate time. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 467-20(1):  
FUNDING FOR CHILDCARE PROVIDERS

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year, on February 23rd, 2024, the Minister of ECE said that ECE is committed to providing sustainable funding to daycares and I am committed to the relationship with childcare providers in finding out what it is they need and how we can support one another. I do believe that statement is true. But there's another voice in the conversation which is that of the territory's largest childcare operator.

Mr. Speaker, last week I received a letter from the constituent who is also a board member of that operator. With their consent, I shared it with the Minister. They outline that this operator is not looking for money from the GNWT but rather a commitment to help them be sustainable. They want to provide a living wage and cost of living increases for their staff, not just for ELCC workers but also their cleaning and cooking staff. Under the current wage grid, they can't do this. Workers haven't received raises in years. They want to ensure that their building has a reserve fund to ensure that they have a cushion to replace the roof, window, or other capital needs throughout the life cycle of the building. Ultimately, they're struggling to cover basic costs because, for this operator, ECE's regulations have created financial pressures such that they can't take basic steps to be a fiscally responsible organization. They want to expand programming and offer more spaces because, as we all know, the Hunger Games for childcare spaces in Yellowknife is in full effect. May the odds ever be in our favour if you want to grow your family and work to pay your bills.

Mr. Speaker, I received a text this morning that this operator had to ask parents to keep kids home today due to staffing pressures. There's no slack when multiple staff are sick. Mr. Speaker, today I'll have questions for the Minister of ECE.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Members' statements. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 468-20(1):  
AURORA COLLEGE COMMUNITY  
LEARNING CENTRE CLOSURES

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residents of the Northwest Territories as a whole has been hit hard with the recent announcements of closures of the community learning centres by the board of governors of Aurora College. Without any community consultation, we are experiencing cuts in smaller communities yet again. This decision shows that the smaller communities do not matter in the development of our territory's economy.

Mr. Speaker, I have been approached by many residents of the Beaufort Delta region, both in person and by social media, and asking why this decision was made without prior consultation. I explained that this decision was not made by the department of ECE but by the board of governors of Aurora College who is at arm's length away from the GNWT. The response that I received was it does not matter who made the decision, this wrong needs to be made right for the benefit of the smaller communities and its residents.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard stories from employees about the uncertainty of their immediate future for themselves, their families, and their respective communities, employees who have given their time and resources to better their communities and their fellow residents. Some of these employees have given 20 years of their lives to try and be part of the development of the Northwest Territories, and yet they do not know what the immediate future holds for them and their families. There is some employees who broke down in tears because of the uncertainty that was bestowed upon them without being consulted prior to this announcement.

Mr. Speaker, in every tough decision that is made in regards to the negative impacts of our smaller communities and its residents, we should see some opportunity - opportunity to give our residents hope. With this untimely decision, we must think of the bigger picture and consult with the employees, the communities, and the residents who are negatively impacted by this controversial decision and make things right for a brighter immediate future. I will have questions for the Minister of ECE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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



MEMBER'S STATEMENT 469-20(1):  
ADULT EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES IN  
THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

**MS. MORGAN:** Mr. Speaker, I want to join some of my colleagues today in highlighting the importance of adult education opportunities in NWT communities. What makes adult education different from early childhood education is that it needs to be more immediately practical and useful to folks to tie into an individual's life goals. We need to stop treating adult education as remedial, something people feel obliged to do because of a lack of failure, as if it's a punishment for somehow not passing school classes in the first place. Instead of being remedial, it should be something that's useful and even transformative.

Community members have been saying for years that enrollment would increase at community learning centres if the programs could lead directly to local employment opportunities and tie into local initiatives. For example, there's demand for pre-trades training in Fort Good Hope to get people ready to work at the upcoming housing construction centre, or maybe a local government or development corporation has a need to train office or business administrators. Instead of doing the same thing that hasn't been working well, or eliminating CLCs entirely, imagine if we had cohorts of students working towards a specific employment qualification with a mix of learning settings. So maybe a roving instructor visits the community for a few weeks at a time, a face-to-face learning, and maybe the cohort would visit a regional centre every so often for hands-on learning, and maybe the rest of the time local tutors could support students in remote learning that could be done in a group setting with the instructor on a large screen. And, ideally, periods of on the land learning could be mixed in there too.

The mobile trades trailers, such as the one established in the Beaufort Delta, are an innovative approach that could be done in more communities with proper resourcing. We need to overcome the destructive politics surrounding on campus programming. This shouldn't be a competition where only one community gets to offer trades programs. We need this kind of programming close to home in all communities.

Beyond preparing for a job or apprenticeship, another important motivator for adults to pursue education is to be better parents. Family literacy programs help train parents on how to support their baby's brain development and language development, even in multiple languages. Mr.

Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Mr. Speaker, family literacy programs can give adults more confidence to engage with their kids' teachers and to support their kids' success in school. So for all these reasons, we can't lose sight of how important adult education is to building up our economic and social foundations. We just have to make it more focused and practical. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 470-20(1):  
BEST PRACTICES IN DENMARK'S  
HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to talk about the Denmark innovation towards public health care. Mr. Speaker, they do something really original. They put the patient before the system.

Mr. Speaker, did you know that in Denmark, the state assigns doctors to its people, Mr. Speaker. Can you imagine that? People being served by the state in a manner that's helpful and useful? They actually put their people ahead of the system, Mr. Speaker. It's quite innovative to think about it.

You know, they do other interesting things. No matter what, if you have a young person, a child who is sick, they find a way to get that person in to see a doctor. Why? Because their people matter more than the process, Mr. Speaker.

And speaking of process, without a system that takes care of you in that manner, me finding a doctor is almost like going to a job interview. You have to find an opening and then you have to sell yourself and explain to your doctor that you're not so complicated that they'll just say yeah, that works within their practice or scope, Mr. Speaker, and then you wait to find out if you're agreeable for their interest, Mr. Speaker. Now, that's assuming you can find a doctor who is taking an opening. And I remember there was a time there was a public phone number that people could call and find out who is taking them.

So why can't we do business different? Oh, wait a minute - it's us; we're the ones in charge of the system. That's why we can't.

Mr. Speaker, it's time to start putting the demands of the patient first. Now, keep in mind that doesn't necessarily mean we're putting the doctors' demands second. As a matter of fact,

if we spent just a little time listening to the doctors and their recommendations, we'd probably be achieving the exact same goal with some minor tweaks.

Mr. Speaker, for example, the doctors will say, you know, when we write referrals we get tired of someone overwriting them, rewriting them, refusing them, sending them back and ignoring them. What can't of doctor wants to work in that kind of system, Mr. Speaker? I'm talking about the gatekeepers who no longer respect doctors' orders.

Mr. Speaker, you know, if we spent a little time listening to our doctors who say they are tired about the administrative focus of their job as opposed to the health care focus of their job, so if we could support them through an administration, we could per hour put some of the most expensive people we have on the payroll doing exactly what they're supposed to be doing.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't exciting innovative stuff. This is straightforward, help the doctors do what the doctors want to do.

Mr. Speaker, I end with the question of is the system designed for the patients, or is the system designed to help support, lock in, what is great about process in the system? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 471-20(1):  
CELEBRATION OF LIFE OF WALLACE  
(WALLY) WATSON

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Colleagues, on September 17th, 2024, Wallace Larry Watson, also known as Wally, passed away here in Yellowknife. Wally was born on April 7th, 1954, in Calgary.

Wally had a life-long love of music and was involved in many music related activities everywhere he lived beginning with participation in his high school choir. He loved playing his guitar and was particularly fond of 70's music. He was frequently in the chorus for the Victoria Operatic Society's productions.

Wally was raised in Victoria, where he met Teresa, his love of his life. Shortly after their marriage in June 1980, they moved to Prince George where Wally took a business administration program at College of New Caledonia. In 1984, they moved to Jean Marie River for Teresa's work where they lived for seven years. Wally worked with the band office as an administrator. He revelled in the new skills, hunting and hauling water, fishing and

setting snares he learned from the wonderful and welcoming residents. Upon moving to Fort Simpson in 1999, Wally became a member of both the Fort Simpson Darts Club and the Seven Spruce Golf Course. Some remember him for his Chanel's Choice dog biscuits. Wally got involved with fiddling by accompanying the youth fiddler group there and really enjoyed sharing his love of music with young people. I had the pleasure of working with him, as he was the secretary treasurer for the local DEA for a year. He was always upbeat and full of good ideas on who we could improve things for the schools in Fort Simpson.

In 2010 they moved to Yellowknife, where Wally enjoyed retirement and spending time with their dog, Chanel. He then became an active member of the Guitar Circle and the Aurora Fiddle Society, accompanying fiddlers on his guitar at performances, jams, and workshops. As well, he had a booth at the summer Farmers' Markets where he sold bake items for several years prior to COVID.

When people spoke about Wally, they remember him as friendly, kind and caring person. Throughout his life, he had a positive outlook and easygoing nature.

Teresa would like to express thanks for all the support she has received in the past few years, particularly with those attending Lunches with a Bunch who made sure he was comfortable; and all hospital staff and EMTs who responded with such compassion and professionalism.

He is survived by wife of 44 years, Teresa, and two and predeceased by brothers Hugh Taylor and Keith Watson. He will be sadly missed.

Members' statements. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Hay River North.

### Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're honoured to be joined by some folks from Hay River here today, both on the floor of the House and in the gallery. I want to recognize Sonya Campbell, who is joining us in the gallery as a chaperon. For our page from Hay River North this sitting, Molly Campbell. We're happy to have them and look forward to working with them. Thank you.

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

**HON. VINCE MCKAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would also like to recognize a

couple guests here from Hay River. Adelle Russell, a page for Hay River South; Molly Campbell, the page from Hay River North; and Sonya Campbell who is up in the gallery there. She is chaperoning them here. And I'd like to welcome them to the Legislative Assembly and hope they enjoy their week here. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Member from Hay River South. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too recognize in the gallery my beautiful wife Aleda Edjericon, and also everybody in the gallery that's here, I just want to say welcome. Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. If we missed anyone in the gallery today, welcome to your chamber. I hope you're enjoying the proceedings. It's always nice to see people in the gallery and allowing us to represent the people of the Northwest Territories here.

Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Replies to the Budget Address, Day 3 of 7. Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

### Oral Questions

#### QUESTION 462-20(1): FORT RESOLUTION REPLACEMENT OF POWER GENERATORS

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank NTPC Minister and their technician staff and contractors for the swift reaction to get into Fort Resolution to restore the power and to keep their homes and community safe. However, my constituents are still wondering why NTPC made the decision to overhaul the generator in Fort Resolution on January 11th, 2025.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of NTPC. My question is why did the NTPC staff wait until January 2025 to do their planned generator replacement versus when the preventive maintenance work could have been done probably in the summer or fall time? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Minister responsible for NTPC.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, it was certainly helpful to have lines of communication open when the event was ongoing, so I do thank the Member for being a part of that.

Mr. Speaker, the events that led to this outage were actually routine operations, so it was not related to any maintenance that as a result of the Taltson being offline. It was to switch over one of the units that was overheating. There was a backup unit there available, there were technicians available, and so they really were not anticipating circumstances to become what they were on that day and, certainly, as it again it was noted, were there and were making efforts to bring things back online as quickly as they could. Thank you.

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is in the event of freezing up homes in my community if it was caused by NTPC's lengthy power outage, who is ultimately responsible to pay for the frozen home repairs if that ever happened? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is standard practice for utilities everywhere in the country that there's not any provisions whereby they would compensate customers who might find themselves in circumstances if they have some damages so there's no difference here with NTPC. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister responsible for NTPC. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Final supplementary.

**MR. EDJERICON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is in the future, can the NTPC look at maybe doing this type of work in the summer months when it's more appropriate versus when it's in January and February and March? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Mr. Speaker, with respect to any major works, they certainly do try to consider timing and availability of backups and obviously certainly at some point extreme weather. Again, with routine maintenance, Mr. Speaker, there's a concern that they've been wanting to maintain reliability so not wanting to wait. At this point, we are expecting the Taltson to be back online I think later this month, subject to confirming that. But with that, that obviously provides a pretty significant source of primary power. So, you know, again, understand the concerns and do want to assure the community that we are expecting they'll be back to their usual source of power with diesel being the backup and this, therefore, should not -- they shouldn't be experiencing any similar problems hopefully for the rest of this year. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 463-20(1):  
AVAILABILITY OF PRIMARY CARE  
PHYSICIANS

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Referring back to my Member's statement today, I talked about the concerns of our general assignment of doctors or I should say availability of doctors. So I ask the Minister of Health and Social Services is why can't our system be set up in a way that we assign patients to doctors as opposed to the other way around? 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, within our system, I hear what the Member is saying, however, there are doctors assigned to the primary care teams that are in Yellowknife, so that's the structure that we work around now. You know, if we look back over the years of how health care was provided and basically clinics were -- we went from a private health care model where doctors set up their own private clinics and, you know, took on patients, whereas right now all of the physicians in our system are now contracted to the NTHSSA and they are -- you know, they -- within that department, they're working within the model of the primary health care model. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Minister's answer of defending status quo process and paperwork because I'm not sure we are doing anything better. I can't -- I'd like to hear what the Minister says we've solved health care problems and assignments. Can the Minister answer that question in the context of why don't we go back to fee for service where doctors could see more patients a day and deliver the same type of results, about serving citizens, and that's exactly what we want. Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have not heard from the physicians that want to go back to fee for service, but I will bring that forward to NTHSSA to see if that's something that they're hearing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the last doctor who talked about, if I may say, a soft way complained or highlighted or raised the flag of scheduling and administration, when they retired, they were no longer welcome back. Mr. Speaker, that type of

frustration, in other words if you speak out about problems you're going to be benched. Mr. Speaker, what type of environment can we create and foster to get intake directly from the doctors about how we can serve our citizens better in a system that works better and is more efficient? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with the -- what the Member is referring to, but what I can say is that just even in this last few months I've had meetings with, you know, with physicians, with the medical -- NWT Medical Association. The PA has met with them, the CEO has met with them. You know, so we are trying to understand what, you know, some of the highlighted issues are with primary care reform and work with the physicians through that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 464-20(1):  
THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATOR FOR THE NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES HEALTH AND SOCIAL  
SERVICES AUTHORITY

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health and Social Services dismissed the health leadership council that provided overall governance to the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority. In their dismissal, which was very clear, that it was not due to cause, that they performed their duties effectively. So can the Minister explain why we need a public administrator if the outgoing council did such a good job? Thank you.

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

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, you know, one of the things with the governing council, I will give it to those Members that sat on those -- that council from those four -- or from the communities, from the regions, they worked very hard representing their communities, bringing forward some of these issues, transitioning them into, you know, how to move this system forward. Many of them have been there since the beginning of the NTHSSA's creation. But the mounting pressure, the mounting financial pressures that they were raising, became clear that the complex situation that, you know, we hear it every day, like, we're hearing it right now - how are we providing access to care? We hear constantly about

access issues. You know, we have small communities where we have health centres that are on emergency services. We have equipment within the NTHSSA that is inhibiting people to phone and make appointments. So it's not just from the access to care. But we also have recruitment issues, morale issues, you know, and I think there's many complex things that this board who work and do this work, they all have other careers. They all -- you know, and so they do this in quarterly meetings. They meet with the -- they used to meet with the chair. So there is more focus now to be able to work with the PA who is continuing to work with the chairs from the regional wellness council to do this work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, certainly, I don't think anyone expects the governance council to run day-to-day operational concerns of the health authority. My question was what does the -- what new powers -- or sorry, what did the council not have that the public administrator does? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the council -- the public administrator has all the powers the governing council had. You know, and I think that's the one thing that the PA also has, is he has the expertise to be able to work and create the plan that everybody wants to see. And so the -- before what was happening was the governing council was expecting this plan to come, you know, and I've heard from many of the regional wellness council chairs that they, you know -- as this deficit grew over the last many years, you know, they continue to be wanting a plan on how they were going to deal with this but the ever growing cost of providing health care in the Northwest Territories, and then many of them said after COVID it got even, you know, more hard to be able to come up with more strategies to be able to provide the access to care that the residents need. So right now what's happening is that the PA is in place to be able to work with the regional wellness councils to work with -- you know, with the priorities of this government to create that plan to move -- you know, to make sure that our health care is sustainable and that we do have access to care to our residents in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the NTHSSA has had deficit reduction plans. They've had independent third-party consultants review their operation. So, again, what is -- what will the public administrator do differently with these plans that the board didn't

do and that the current administration of NTHSSA is not doing? I just don't understand why this is -- can the Minister just explain why this is such an important decision that is going to move things along when the old board and council could not do so? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I'm working with the PA, once I have -- what is he doing right now is he's analyzing, he's working -- like I said, he's working with the regional wellness chairs, getting their feedback. He is doing the work that he needs to do right now with the CEO, understanding the complexities of our organization, and he will be coming back with a plan. And as soon as that plan comes back to Cabinet, I will be sharing it and discussing it with the Regular Members so that we're all 19 members in this House moving forward on a better plan on how we are going to make sure that the health care in the Northwest Territories is sustainable and that our residents have access to health care. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 465-20(1):  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES EARLY  
LEARNING AND CHILDCARE AGREEMENT

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister explain what part of the agreement with the federal government for affordable childcare doesn't allow larger operators for making financially sound decisions like growing reserve fund or modest salary increases for workers? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Canada-NWT Canada-wide ELCC agreement requires that the GNWT implement a certification system and a wage grid for early childhood educators and also that it achieves the average \$10 a day per childcare fees for families in the Northwest Territories. However, the agreement does not define specifics on how the GNWT is to implement the certification or wage grid. That's something that we were able to do here in the territory by meeting with our stakeholders.

The wage grid identifies an hourly minimum that an educator must receive but doesn't set out the maximum, and the regulations do not prevent them from going above that.

In regards to a contingency fund, the centre-based operators are allowed to maintain funds as long as the contingency fund does not exceed an amount equal to three months or more than three months of operating expenses, and that amount can also exceed those three months as long as the funds don't come from ECE. So, for example, if they are doing fundraising and events like that, they are able to keep that amount and it doesn't count towards their three-month maximum. And in addition to that, there is nothing in the regulations that prohibits a licensed centre-based operator from accessing alternative fundraising -- or sorry, alternative sources of funding like fundraising, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**MS. REID:** Okay, so the math is not mathing still for me because -- I'm happy that the Minister has explained that a little bit better; it helps me put things together, but I also understand that the pressures of operating such a large daycare, largest in the territory, mean that there are cost pressures that are not adequately being addressed under these parameters.

So, Mr. Speaker, is it possible for the Minister to amend the regulations to allow for different scale and scope of operators to exist in the territory noting that, of course, daycare looks different in Tsiigehtchic than it does in Yellowknife. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member. And I think it's fair to recognize that there have certainly -- I don't think it's a secret to anybody in this room, there's certainly been some growing pains as far as implementing our \$10 dollar a day average childcare across the territory.

Our existing wage grid regulations have not fully come into force. So right now, ECE is working with operators to determine what that looks like, so with our centre-based operators. And that also means that not everyone has gone through the process of doing their certification and so not everyone is seeing the -- or sorry, early childhood operators across the territory are not yet seeing the increases based on their level of experience and as well their level of education. So until we see the regulations fully come into force, we won't be able to see how it's working throughout the territory. And so at this time, I would say to the Member that we really need to see how it comes into force and how it ends up working out throughout the territory before we determine what is and is not working. Thank you.

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

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding -- and I've highlighted this to the Minister already -- that this operator is concerned that the ELCC staff at ECE are -- you know, not in great contact with this operator. Can the Minister work to resolve this? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am in direct contact with the senior staff of education, culture and employment seven days a week unfortunately for them, but I very much appreciate how accessible they are. And as soon as I did receive the correspondence from the MLA, I immediately did reach out to the deputy minister because like I did say last year, these relationships are paramount and we want to ensure that the childcare sector is well supported and well informed and has access to answers to their questions. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 466-20(1):  
AURORA COLLEGE CLOSURE OF  
COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To date, since the announcement of closures of the community learning centres, what has the department done in making recommendations as to what is going to happen in the near future with the community learning centres? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for the question. So in regards to the community learning centres, where we're at right now is working with Aurora College to gain clarity on what part of that space they continue to filling within communities and which part of that space they intend to pull back from so that we know as the Department of Education, Culture and Employment where we need to kind of react and be able to work with communities on ensuring access to adult education in small communities across the territory. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister give me and this House the number of employees who are directly impacted by the

closure of the community learning centres?  
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can certainly pull that back up for the Member. We did all receive an email that spoke directly to that. I just don't have it immediately at my fingertips right this very second. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Mackenzie Delta. Final supplementary.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister conduct public consultation to the employees and affected communities on what the plans are for the learning centres within each respective community? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I guess there's two things at play here. The first is that Aurora College will have a responsibility for communicating their plan, but ultimately as Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, I think there is a responsibility to ensure that all residents of the Northwest Territories understand what the go-forward plan is and what parts of that plan will be administered by Aurora College and what parts might fall to either Education, Culture and Employment or another entity within the Northwest Territories. And so I think there is a responsibility for some joint communication here to be able to share with all residents of the territory what that looks like. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 467-20(1):  
AURORA COLLEGE CLOSURE OF  
COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. So on Friday, the Minister committed to publicly releasing a report on the community learning centres, completed just last year, that was based on a set of community consultations that assessed how well the community learning centres were working and what could be done better. So can the Minister confirm whether in those consultations, did communities recommend that the community learning centres be shut down, or did they provide suggestions for more innovative and effective approaches to adult education programming? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that this afternoon those reports are now online and as soon as I stop answering questions, I'll be able to send an email to my colleagues to let them know those links. So, Mr. Speaker, there -- to start, there was a facilities master plan that was released by the GNWT in September of 2022. In April of 2024, there was community learning centre reports, along with What We Heard reports, that were commissioned by the GNWT and also community learning centres facilities report. These reports, Mr. Speaker, did not identify the closure of community learning centres as part of their recommendations. They did identify things like flexibility, variety of programming, and being responsive to community needs as some of the preferences and suggestions, and then they also did talk about different projected enrolments, staffing models, financial capacity. So there was a variety of things that the reports did explore, and I look forward to providing those links both to Members of this House, and I can commit to also putting them on my Facebook page. Thank you.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for confirming that, in fact, the actions taken by the college went against what communities had been saying in the consultations about the CLCs.

What has the Minister heard from organizations other than Aurora College, such as Indigenous governments or development corporations, the literacy council or Dechinta, regarding their interest in offering the kind of adult education to fill the gap being left by Aurora College? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at this point I don't have specifics to share, but I mean, certainly there's been interest in everything from filling the space in its entirety or filling parts of the space. There's also been interest in using some of the facilities for something different that might speak to some of the needs in communities. So this has certainly started a lot of buzz and conversation about what the future of not only adult learning in communities looks like but also future uses of these facilities, which I think is really interesting, because I think it's important that we do use this as an opportunity and be creative in what the next chapter looks like. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final

supplementary. Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And so on the related subject of family-based literacy programming, what is ECE doing to promote family-based literacy and learning instead of just school-based learning, or has this fallen off the radar with the introduction of junior kindergarten and the focus on childcare? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** So, colleagues, that's a different line of questioning where we started off so I'm going to go to -- do you have another question with CLCs? Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Okay. Can the Minister confirm what will be the next steps in terms of her interaction with Aurora College to help sort out what parts of this adult education space Aurora College still wants to continue filling? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at this point we're working with Aurora College to really gain clarity on what the picture will look like, and our actions from there will be to determine how we go about working with our education partners and stakeholders across the territory to ensure that at the end of the day we still are providing options for adult education and opportunities for education and employment in our small communities across the territory. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 468-20(1):  
HOUSING NORTHWEST TERRITORIES  
NEW HOUSING BUILDS IN INUVIK

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have questions for the Minister of housing. Mr. Speaker, I know she's live and well aware of the work that the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation/the Gwich'in Tribal Council are doing in Inuvik around new housing. My question is what or how many new units are planned by the NWT Housing Corporation for Inuvik? Thank you.

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

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in the current fiscal year, we have a duplex that was completed in Inuvik and also 34 units that are under the modernization and improvement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And that's excellent information. And I'm wondering, can the Minister give me a timeline on the renovations? Given the long waitlist that we do have Inuvik, the timeline on when those 34 units are being renovated, what kind of a timeline are we looking at for those? Thank you.

**HON. LUCY KUPTANA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In terms of a timeline for the M and I projects, we're looking at spring of 2025 to complete most. We are waiting on approval for the biomass project for the 17-unit apartment in Inuvik to transfer that over to a biomass energy. So waiting on approval on further funding for that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 469-20(1):  
PROMOTING INDIGENOUS  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE NWT

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, for programming such as the SEED program, the artist to market programs, or financing programs, can the Minister confirm if representatives from ITI and Prosper NWT go into the small communities to promote programs? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Monfwi. Minister responsible for ITI.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we do have a regional office that does travel into communities and work specifically with the ED -- sorry, the economic development officers that are also funded by ITI that work within the community, and that is afforded through the community transfer initiatives. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. Besides funding opportunities, what type of educational programming is available to develop business skills for residents in our small communities? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's everything from training workshops, workforce development, through Education, Culture and Employment, not just ITI. There's also support afforded through on-the-job training. And so ECE does do wage subsidy programs that employers also do have access to. Workshops are everything from arts focused to tourism focused and even agriculture focused as well. And you know, when I look at the numbers,



there's certainly some good activity happening within the region, but also always, always looking for more opportunities as well. Thank you.

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

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. Is entrepreneurship in general being promoted by ITI on the ground in our small communities? Thank you.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I certainly would hope so. There are 2.5 positions for economic development officers within Tlicho community, and the Tlicho communities also do have the Tlicho regional economic development working group that those economic development officers directly work with, and that is in support of the economic development strategy that was produced by the Tlicho government between 2022 and -- or for 2022 to 2027. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 470-20(1):  
TARGETED AMENDMENTS TO THE WATER  
REGULATIONS

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Mr. Speaker, in the previous sitting of the Assembly in October, I asked the Minister about the ongoing issue of targeted amendments to the waters regulations. The Minister committed to come back to the House with a timeline for Members. I'm just wondering, Mr. Speaker, if the Minister has an update for the House today on that process. Thank you.

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

**HON. JAY MACDONALD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes, the issue around water regulations has certainly been a topic of much conversation over the past number of months since the last sitting, and I'm very happy to stand here today and, you know, report to this House that right now, ECC has received approval from Cabinet and the IGCS to proceed with the appraised approach to amend the Waters Act and the water regulations with Phase 1 be the targeted approach to making amendments that were suggested by the land and water board, some of the Indigenous governments and the Chamber of Mines. We're currently in the process of working toward

planning those meetings. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that news from the Minister. That certainly is encouraging. Can the Minister give us an idea of what kind of a timeline we're looking at for this. He did commit to give that to me in the previous sitting of the House. Thanks.

**HON. JAY MACDONALD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, currently, we're -- like I said earlier, we're in the planning stages, and we are targeting to have a more concrete plan available in the spring that we'll be able to deliver at the next meeting of the Mackenzie Valley operational dialogue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, is the department planning to run this process through the operational dialogue, or are they going to be running the process themselves? It's becoming a bit unclear to me how this is going to play out, what the expected timeline is. I just want to remind the House and the Minister that the idea of doing targeted amendments was to get it done quickly if possible. Just looking for some more clarity on how this process is going to play out and hoping to get some kind of indication from the Minister that we might be able to see the changes come forward within the year. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

**HON. JAY MACDONALD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, right now ECC is in the planning stages with the IGCS technical working group to advance the amendments to the targeted amendments to the water regulations, and it certainly is an area of high priority. We certainly, you know, want this to happen very, very quickly, and it is a process that will happen outside in the Mackenzie Valley operational dialogue, but we are definitely pushing forward to get that work done as quickly as possible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 471-20(1):  
THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATOR FOR THE NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES HEALTH AND SOCIAL  
SERVICES AUTHORITY

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, given that the NWT government has hired the Saskatchewan health care expert, and now I call him the health care czar, to reengineer the NWT health system and certainly given the fact that the Minister has shared with Members confidentially, of course, Mr. Speaker, the mandate of the health care czar, and the only person who can make it public is the Minister, would the Minister be willing to table that mandate letter of the public administrator before the House so Northerners can find out what's actually being directed here and if she can't table it, can she explain why transparency isn't the best approach for Northerners? 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, currently, the -- I have the information before me, and I have -- I'm just in the process of reviewing what will be shared with the Members, and at that time I will table that in the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll take whatever we can get and certainly table it before the House would be good for everyone. Knowing that -- also, Mr. Speaker, knowing this information about what the health care czar is doing and knowing that the NWT health and social services budget isn't approved until the Assembly's budget has been approved and is long gone and the House is closed up, Mr. Speaker, for clarity would the Minister be willing to table NTHSSA's draft budget publicly before we review the department of health so we know what we're actually approving, not just the dollar amount, and we have trust and faith that new programs are being offered or we have clarity where reductions and cuts are being expected? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Minister of Health and Social Services. It was a fine line; I was almost sending it back to the bull pen. Minister of Health and Social Services.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as NTHSSA, you know, when we look at a lot of our different departments within our ministries, NTHSSA is arm's length and, therefore, the public administrator will be working with the NTHSSA with whatever the budget is for the next coming

year. And then when we do have that, that's when that will be tabled. That is the process, and you know, I know that this year it seems like there's a different approach in the process and with part of the work that we've been trying to do within, you know, making sure that we're staying within our limits and spending within our limits is looking at the NTHSSA's policy on the change that they no longer -- the deficit budgeting that went on for many, many years, and so this is what's being worked on, and it is every year tabled in the House once they have their budget. So I will follow the process that we have and, again, I will -- when I do have the information, I said it last week, I will share that with Regular Members. Thank you.

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

**MR. HAWKINS:** Mr. Speaker, when we think of the whole budget -- and I'm not getting into the details of the budget specifically that hasn't been tabled -- it's something in the range of \$700 million. We're being asked to take a lot of it at good faith, in other words. That's a lot of millions, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Minister says the process. Well, we are in charge of the process. She is in charge of the process. So in other words, the people that can change the process are us. Mr. Speaker, the question really is designed around how can MLAs be informed as to what's actually happening behind the scenes before it's too late? Because I'm being told by NGOs that they're being told that their budgets are being cut, and the only way we can talk about it is when that budget's tabled which is sometime long after this sitting. So how can we work better together when that's all we hear we're not working together? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I said, I will -- when I have the NTHSSA's budget, I will have that conversation with the Members. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 472-20(1):  
THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATOR FOR THE NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES HEALTH AND SOCIAL  
SERVICES AUTHORITY

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister mentioned that she's ready to come -- or she will be prepared to come back to the House with a plan from the

public administrator to solve the problems we have in health care or at least start to solve them. When can we expect to see that plan; can we have a date? Thank you.

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

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I did say last week that I would -- you know, I'm meeting with the PA. I'm looking at, you know, his -- the timeline that he has that he's reviewing. You know, there's many regions within the Northwest Territories. He's here in Yellowknife doing the work that he's doing here. He still has to meet with the regional authority -- like, the regional health authorities. And so where I'm at right now is that hopefully we'll have a plan to bring forward to Cabinet and then to Regular Members in March. Thank you.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, does the public administrator have a schedule the Minister's aware of when he'll conclude his consultations with regional health advisory councils and authorities? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you. I do not have that information as I met with him prior to session. I will be meeting with him again not until next week in regards to our regular meetings, and I can ask that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, March is not a date, so I'm wondering if the Minister can commit to a specific date when the House can expect a plan or at least -- or a deadline when a plan should be made available. I think this is important for us so we have a comfort that the process is moving along; there's a clear deadline. I don't -- earlier or later, that's fine, but we need something set so we know what the deliverable is, our constituents will know when the deliverable is, and we can hold the Minister accountable for this -- for the commitments towards the public administrator improving the health care system. Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I cannot commit to a date right now. Things change rapidly. I may -- you know, maybe it will be sooner; maybe it will be at the beginning. There might be travel issues. There might be -- you know, there might be more information that is required. So to be able to come up with a plan to be able to present timelines, I will -- as I said,

I will follow up and I will get back to the Members, and I will hopefully have a plan before the end of March. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 473-20(1):  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES EARLY  
LEARNING AND CHILDCARE AGREEMENT

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that from the conversations I'm having that \$10 a day childcare helps families, but it seems to be hurting ELCC operators at the scale. So the issue is not so much that the wage ceiling as the Minister said in one of her earlier replies today. It's the funding that's allocated by the GNWT. So what I would like to know, Mr. Speaker -- and maybe I'll just try and put it more clearly -- is operators can't make up the difference due to caps on what they can charge families, the Minister mentioned fundraising, I believe. Is there any other way right now currently that the Minister can see to making things more manageable for operators at a larger scale? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are certainly some options for other funding. I did use the example of fundraising. If there is another source that a childcare facility is looking at bringing in to access funding, certainly would want to know about it and be able to work alongside the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to explore that option. We certainly do want our childcare facilities to stay open and stay operational.

I think a couple of things here, Mr. Speaker, I will absolutely acknowledge that the original agreement was signed before extreme inflation across the country, and this has certainly been something that has been routinely raised at our federal, territorial, provincial tables by multiple jurisdictions, and there have been some responses to that in allowing different operators to bring up their wages so that there is parity between them.

And the other piece I wanted to raise for the Member is because the wage grid hasn't been fully implemented, it means that those increases in payment have not been felt by our early childhood educators. But what I can say here, Mr. Speaker, is every single childcare provider across the territory saw an increase to

their funding post implementation of this agreement. Thank you.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that. One option that has been floated to me by the board member of this operator is possibly asking families to have a membership fee, but that doesn't seem to be allowed by the regulations. Is that something that the Minister could contemplate? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when I received the letter from the Member, I did go through it line by line. I highlighted different sections of the letter and different pieces that were raised by the childcare provider, and membership fees was one of them and so that is something that I have put to the department and would be happy to loop back around once we've had the opportunity to look into that. Thank you.

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

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And just to note that part of what I was trying to highlight in my Member's statement, and in my last question a few minutes ago, was that adult education is not just about job training but it also can include parents wanting to improve their literacy and learning in conjunction with their young and not-so-young children. So my question now is about family based literacy and learning.

My understanding is that the GNWT was exploring a model of early childhood learning that was centered around providing resources and involving all the family members; however, that seems to have fallen off the radar with the introduction of junior kindergarten. So can the Minister explain what is ECE doing to promote a family-based literacy and learning model instead of just focusing on school-based learning? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for coming back to this question.

Mr. Speaker, it certainly has not fallen off the table, and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment does afford some funding for family literacy and then also does afford funding, like, directly to communities, directly to NGOs, and then also enlists the NWT Literacy Council to afford some of that. So in

2024-2025, ECE provided the NWT Literacy Council with \$420,000 in funding. And this funding is used to train, mentor, and support community members to design, develop, and deliver community-based family literacy programs. And the importance here is working with -- or NWT literacy works with communities to ensure that that programming is culturally relevant and is available to be used for all official languages in the Northwest Territories.

In addition to that, ECE also delivers the community literacy development fund, and this is financial help for community organizations that want to do local programs to increase literacy skills and also literacy awareness, and so we've got kind of two kind of core main pieces there that still do afford funding to communities for that.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that answer. So in my discussions with the NWT Literacy Council, I understand that there's huge demand for those family literacy programs and they could definitely be much expanded to meet that demand. So, in this era of fiscal sustainability, has the department examined not only the costs, you know, in grant and contribution funding but also the short and long-term benefits that could come from an even more concerted focus on family literacy programs? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for that question. There's certainly not only literacy programs happening through these organizations, there's also awareness and encouragement happening even from our schools themselves to encourage literacy in the home. And with our new training certification wage grid as well with our ELCCs, this type of work in reading to children and such is also, as we know, happening in our daycares and our day home providers as well. And so it's not just a solution that requires more funding, although the NWT Literacy Council does amazing work, and certainly want to see opportunities like that grow in the territory but, really, it's about looking at this and determining how we all can help support literacy across the territory. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 474-20(1):

FAMILY-BASED LITERACY AND LEARNING  
MODE

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister point to where in this government's

business plans or strategies she can show that we have a real serious focus on improving family literacy? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think that we have a real focus from this Assembly on supporting healthy families, and I think that literacy is a huge component of family units and family structures. And so what I would say to that is that has everything to do with, you know, how we are growing babies on the inside and continuing to support children once they're on the outside and how we're supporting teens and adults and communities. I think literacy and the health of our family units and the health of our communities absolutely relates to literacy. And so I think that has to do with everything that we're doing as an Assembly, whether that's ensuring that we are supporting residents to be involved in housing and to be involved in the trades and building and supporting of stable housing, whether that is through education pursuits and ensuring that we're building a strong economic foundation for the entire territory, whether that is about health care. And we want more residents to be involved directly in health care across the territory so I would say that literacy really is the underpinning of all of these pieces, and so certainly something that we want to continue to invest in. But investments don't only come in the form of money, and so I think that investment really -- you know, it comes from absolutely everybody. It's even within the work that we're doing in Education, Culture and Employment in Indigenous languages. It relates to absolutely everything, Mr. Speaker, and I agree with the Member, that literacy is incredibly important, and we need to work both wholistically and strategically as a territory to ensure that we're supporting literacy from start to finish. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 475-20(1):  
BUDGETING PROCESS FOR NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES HEALTH AND SOCIAL  
SERVICES AUTHORITY

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I want to ask the Minister of Health and Social Services regarding the process and transparency. That's my only focus around this, not about the specifics of what may or may not be happening, so just to make sure it's fully clear. And, of course, the rules of anticipation, so the public's aware, Mr. Speaker, is that we're not allowed to talk about something before the

Assembly or coming before the Assembly. So I'm just about the process.

Mr. Speaker, when the Minister will say we have an arm's length process, you know, the reality is the Minister is the arm and she is the process, so when we have a budget that is bigger than ECE and when we have a budget that is practically 20 percent of the Assembly's budget, are we voting on this like a what's called a black budget? And that's a covert type of budget where we don't get to see the specifics but we have to vote on the number. How are we serving the public best by not having any clue about what's being offered up in that budget? 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, you know, as I mentioned before, like, we're having this conversation about the college. We're having these conversations about NTPC. We're having these conversations about all of these -- you know, that they determine and their expertise within NTHSSA will determine, by using the priorities that are given, and like I said, I will share the mandate with the Members and, you know, and table it in this House on the direction that is given to them. That was the same thing that was given to the direction of the governing council before and so they -- they build their budget and based on the services that are provided that -- you know, that we have currently, and therefore that is ongoing. You know, whether or not we're going to change that today, I don't think that's going to happen. So I mean, we can have further conversations about this and I mean, like -- I'll just leave it at that, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, again, I want to reaffirm it's about process and transparency I'm after. And just for definition, so people know what it means, a black budget appropriation is when a government's budget is allocated in a classified manner that's secret, Mr. Speaker.

So we don't know what's being approved. So I'm asking with respect to the dollar amounts, what type of public transparency and discussion can we have here in this House and before the public before these types of things are approved? Thank you.

**HON. LESA SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take that question on notice. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when will the Minister have access to NTHSSA's budget? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Sorry, colleagues, that's already been taken as notice, it's close enough, from the Minister on that. So any other oral questions? Oral questions.

Written questions. Member from Range Lake.

### Written Questions

WRITTEN QUESTION 13-20(1):  
PHYSICIAN STAFFING

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the following questions with respect to health care management to the Minister of Health and Social Services. Please provide the following:

1. How many full-time physicians were hired by the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority (NTHSSA) last fiscal year;
2. How many full-time physicians left their employment with the NTHSSA last fiscal year;
3. A breakdown of the reasons for why full-time physicians left their employment with NTHSSA last fiscal year, including resignation, term expiration, retirement, termination, and any other relevant reason;
4. A breakdown of the full-time physicians who left their employment with NTHSSA last fiscal year by practice and specialty; and,
5. A breakdown of locum versus resident full-time physicians who left their employment with NTHSSA last fiscal year.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Range Lake. 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 ITI.

### Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 282-20(1):  
CANADA ENERGY REGULATOR'S 2023-24 ANNUAL REPORT OF ACTIVITIES UNDER THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES' OIL AND GAS OPERATIONS ACT

**HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: Canada Energy Regulator's 2023-2024 Annual Report of Activities under the Northwest Territories' Oil and Gas Operations Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you. Tabling of documents. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

TABLED DOCUMENT 283-20(1):  
PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY FOR BILL 17: MUNICIPAL AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT

TABLED DOCUMENT 284-20(1):  
STATEMENT OF CONSISTENCY FOR BILL 17: MUNICIPAL AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT

**HON. VINCE McKAY:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following two documents: Plain Language Summary for Bill 17, Municipal and Community Affairs Statutes Amendment Act; and Statement of Consistency for Bill 17, Municipal and Community Affairs Statutes Amendment Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Tabling of documents. Minister of Justice.

TABLED DOCUMENT 285-20(1):  
PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY FOR BILL 18: AN ACT TO AMEND THE PARTNERSHIP AND BUSINESS NAMES ACT

TABLED DOCUMENT 286-20(1):  
STATEMENT OF CONSISTENCY FOR BILL 18: AN ACT TO AMEND THE PARTNERSHIP AND BUSINESS NAMES ACT

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following two documents: Plain Language Summary for Bill 18, An Act to Amend the Partnership and Business Names Act; and, a Statement of Consistency for Bill 18, An Act to Amend the Partnership and Business Names Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

TABLED DOCUMENT 287-20(1):  
DECHINTA RETURN ON INVESTMENT  
REPORT

**MS. MORGAN:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the Dechinta Return on Investment Report prepared by the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Motions. Notices of motion for first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

### Second Reading of Bills

BILL 17:  
MUNICIPAL AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS  
STATUTES AMENDMENTS ACT,  
CARRIED

**HON. VINCE McKAY:** Mr. Speaker, I move, second by the honourable Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes, that Bill 17, Municipal and Community Affairs Statutes Amendments Act, be read for the first time.

This bill is amending three Acts: The Fire Prevention Act, the NWT 911 Act, and the Western Canadian Lotteries Act. This bill establishes the Municipal and Community Affairs Statutes Amendments Act will adjust the reporting timelines of the reports required under these three Acts to provide sufficient time for MACA to collect valuable data from various sources ensuring accurate and comprehensive reporting. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question has been called. The question is shall Bill 17 be read for a second time. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? The motion is carried. Bill 17 has been read a second time and will be referred to a standing committee of the Assembly for further consideration.

---Carried

Second reading of bills. Minister of Justice.

BILL 18:  
AN ACT TO AMEND THE PARTNERSHIP  
AND BUSINESS NAMES ACT,  
CARRIED

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Kam Lake, that Bill 18, An Act to Amend the

Partnership and Business Names Act, will be read for the second time.

This bill will amend the act so that a name registration, which is under judicial review, is not stayed during the review period to avoid unreasonable and unpredictable delays in registering business names. In addition, the amendments seek to make the language more gender inclusive. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question has been called. The question is shall Bill 18 be read for a second time. All those in favour? All those opposed? All those abstentions? Abstaining? The motion is carried. Bill 18 has been read for a second time and is referred to a standing committee of the Assembly for further consideration.

---Carried

Second reading of bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, Tabled Document 275-20(1), Tabled Document 279-20(1), with the Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh in the chair.

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

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Calling committee to order. I will now call the committee to order. What is the wish of the committee? I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, committee wishes to consider Tabled Document 279-20(1), Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. We'll take a short recess, about 20 minutes. Okay, thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Committee, Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, Tabled Document 279-20(1), Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, February 10th, 2025.

Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 279-20(1) Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025. Does the Minister of Finance wish to bring witnesses into the House?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Yes.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):**

Thank you. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witness into the Chamber. Would the Minister please introduce her witnesses.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, on my left, Bill MacKay as deputy minister of finance. And on my right, Mandi Bolstad as the deputy secretary to the financial management board.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. We began consideration of these supplementary estimates on Friday, February 7th, 2025. When we reported progress on Friday, we were considering a motion to defer further consideration of the directorate activity in the Department of Finance. That motion was moved by the Member from Range Lake. It was in order and has been distributed. Before we proceed today, we will need to conclude consideration of this motion. Do any Members wish to speak to the motion. I'm going to go the Minister on this.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'm certainly happy to speak, again, a little bit to some of the circumstances that led to the proposal to have a \$12 million over four years, so 48 over four years rather, 12 a year, and hopefully that can alleviate some of the concern or confusion.

What was in my mind, and I just couldn't find my notes from last week because, really, they were relating to my knowledge of this from being NTPC Minister, one of the reasons for selecting this option of doing the \$12 million over four, it -- well, for one, it was the lowest rate impact that we were looking to achieve at a reasonable impact to the GNWT, and we were comparing it against an opportunity or an option to put the \$48 million, just slightly over \$48 million, on the Taltson overhaul as that might align with some of the costs that we were seeing there.

That option, though, because of the user pay model in the space wouldn't result in different communities in different regions having different rate impacts from the GRA. By putting a rate subsidy directly allows NTPC to propose

an impact that would be equal and even on the rates across the territories and actually result in a better outcome than what an infrastructure contribution would be, so. And, yes, I'm sorry I didn't have that information on Friday. I'm happy to relay that and happy to answer any further questions if there are any. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I seek unanimous consent to waive Rule 6.2(14) to withdraw Motion 71 although debate has already begun. Thank you.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** The motion is withdrawn. And, committee, I will call the key activity again.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Finance, operations expenditures, directorate, not previously authorized, \$11,950,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Committee, Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Finance, operations expenditures, human resources, not previously authorized, negative \$30,000. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Finance, operations expenditures, human resources, not previously authorized, negative \$30,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

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

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Finance, operations expenditures, total department not previously authorized, \$11,920,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Please turn to page 8 for the Department of Health and Social Services.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department



of Health and Social Services, operations expenditures, administrative and support services, not previously authorized, negative \$23,000. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Health and Social Services, operations expenditures, administrative support services, not previously authorized, negative \$23,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

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

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Health and Social Services, operations expenditures, health and social services programs, not previously authorized, \$6,022,000. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Health and Social Services, operations expenditures, health and social services programs, not previously authorized, \$6,022,000. Does the committee agree? I got Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. I'd like to ask about the contract -- sorry, the \$2.4 million and change to provide -- reflect the impact of costs associated with agency and contract staffing. Can the Minister explain what that is. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, that is a request for a shortfall that is being experienced both at NTHSSA and the Tliche Community Services Agency, and so there's some for agency nurses as well as agency nurses is about \$1.9 million, but then you also have paramedics at 1.4 and pharmacists in addition to that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So in the TCSA, does the Minister have the breakdown on who's being -- which contracts are present at the TCSA out of those agency nurses, paramedics, and pharmacies; is it all three or just one or two or whatever? Maybe more detail, please. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I mean, Mr. Chair, I do -- so I do have the breakdowns as between TCSA versus NTHSSA but I'm not -- I don't know that I have the breakdown individually within each region or community, so if that's the level of detail that the Member's looking for I would have to -- although I can see if perhaps deputy secretary might have more information.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'll go to the deputy secretary.

**MS. MANDI BOLSTAD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So it's primarily agency nurses between the three that make up the majority of the expenditure, the paramedics contract, and there's a very small amount for a pharmacist contract in Inuvik that was only \$37,000. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. So the Minister can confirm, then, that agency nurses have been deployed to both -- sorry, to the TCSA and to NTHSSA? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, that does look correct. So both -- all three, actually, we have Stanton, Inuvik, as well as the Tliche. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Does the Minister have the total that we've expended on agency nurses in the last -- yeah, in the last 2014-2015 estimates? Just looking for, like, if there's a wrap-up with these costs on top of what we've already spent. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Mr. Chair, I don't have that. I have only the information with respect to the supplementary estimates here in front of me. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** I'm sorry, could the Minister repeat her answer.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Mr. Chair, I have -- I only have here the supplementary estimates total. I don't have the original line item. I may be able to find it. It would be a line item potentially in the 2025-2026 budget but that is considered by committee. So I -- yes, I don't have the original budget; I have only the supplementary estimates around here, sorry. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Moving on to the costs for contract services in the Beaufort Delta, \$791,000. Can the Minister provide substantiation for that as well. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, that is required to do -- to deal with the projected shortfall in contracted services in Beaufort Delta. So obviously NTHSSA is responsible for health and social services in the Beaufort Delta region, particularly with respect to the Inuvik Regional Hospital. The kinds of things that fall under contract services would include security, dietary provisions, catering, laundry, housekeeping, switchboard and reception services, and as well as some on-site -- any kind of on-site management support not health care related, that tends to be through service contracts. And so there is, again, as I note a net shortfall here of \$791,000. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. The chemotherapy drugs -- I know this has been kind of an ongoing difficulty in trying to tamp down on, like, a very clear cost related to chemotherapy drugs. Can the Minister speak to that because these are -- these costs continue to increase, and I think one of the issues related to health care sustainability is certainly the affordability of drugs. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So two issues there. One is the chemotherapy drugs specifically which is what this particular item is in relation to. The services here, obviously costs are going up, drug costs are going up. There are some recoveries and some rebates as a result of agreements that are

being signed in terms of providing the ability to seek some lower cost drugs, but we do have a shortage at \$484,000. There's more clients requiring the drugs and then also the fact that the drugs are more costly.

Mr. Chair, more broadly, with drug-related costs and expenditures, certainly, again, I would probably defer that to Minister of Health and Social Services, but I know there is a fair bit of effort in the space to sign further and other agreements that can help lead to reduce costs on drugs, again, broadly across the board. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Okay, thank you for that. Can the Minister provide substantiation for the tuberculosis outbreak response. It's just under \$600,000. What was that required for? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, so seeking \$586,000 for added expenses as a result of this outbreak. This was -- some might recall that the CPHO declared a TB outbreak in Yellowknife July 2nd of 2024, and that resulted in incremental costs. Some of the things that occurred, there was -- there were some 532 contact points relating to just a few cases, and as a result of which a fair bit of effort that was undertaken to identify those contacts, locate them, some additional supports from the public health nurses to do the contact tracing of all those individuals, then of course supported an additional costs to the clients who were receiving treatment and those that were contacted obviously increased testing, and so some additional workload to manage the additional testing and the lab work that was required, increased workload to radiologists. There's -- chest x-rays are a part of the diagnostic tool for some of the individuals who were identified or contacted. In addition, because of the contact tracing and the nature of people's movements, there was some staff travelling to communities. And last but not least, again, some additional lab supplies to help be able to move this through quickly so that there could be a prevention of any more extensive outbreak. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So for the \$1.9 million for the agency nurses, does the Minister have any detail on what that is

inclusive of? Do we have overtime costs, travel costs, accommodation costs; is there a breakdown she can provide? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I don't have that level of detail here. I'm not sure if -- no, I don't have that level of detail, Mr. Chair.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Is the -- would the Minister indicate how much of this is in compensation -- direct compensation to the agencies?

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, it -- there is both, in terms of it being the cost of the contracts which would be the salary benefits to the nurses that are providing services, as well as some travel costs and accommodation costs if there's folks who are coming in from outside and require such additional costs. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Nothing further, thank you.

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

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the previous Member for asking for the substantiation on the TB outbreak. I'm curious how many staff were required for this expenditure. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I can tell you that with respect to the public health nurses, there were seven nurses involved. Community health had two staff involved. Public health practitioners had two folks involved. There was a physician -- one physician involved, lab technologists involved, two laboratory clerks involved, one medical radiation technologist involved. Obviously, some of those individuals, this is not necessarily full-time work and wouldn't -- would likely have required some additional efforts and additional time and staffing in order to manage the expanding workload. Thank you.

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

**MS. REID:** Thank you. So just for clarification, the folks who helped on the surge response for the outbreak, their salary is then costed to this item? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure that they would have their salaries entirely costed to this, Mr. Chair. I mean, I can certainly -- would expect that it's more to do with additional costing and not necessarily exclusive costing. I can double check. I'd have to go back and look at, you know, what their base salaries are or whether there was overtime incurred, and I don't have that breakdown here.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, no, I would appreciate seeing that if it could be provided as well as the costing around the additional lab work, x-rays, and travel that the Minister mentioned. It just seems like an awful lot of money for a short amount of time but perhaps with more information, I'll be able to understand that better. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nothing further.

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

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. First I wanted to ask a question about an additional -- well, almost half a million dollars in funding for the in-territory child and family services program within the Tlicho Community Services Agency. Can the Minister clarify why there's such a large amount of funds needed for just this particular region now, so whether -- those costs must have been unexpected somehow? So what happened that created these new or additional expenses in child and family services for the Tlicho Community Services Agency? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, for this one, there certainly are some shortfalls being projected. Mr. Chair, let me direct that one over to the deputy minister and see if he can get that level of detail. Thank you.

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

**MR. BILL McKAY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So there are a number of factors that are for all three territorial health and social services authorities that are requiring more money to be spent on child and family supports. It's just that the Tlicho region was unable to offset those costs from other areas so they require a supplementary appropriation for this purpose. Thank you.

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

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you. Does the Minister know, does this reflect a sudden spike in, for example, children being apprehended or taken into care or something different that has happened, or these are just sort of run-of-the-mill incremental sort of forced growth costs? And if she is not aware, I can follow up later with the health and social services Minister. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Yes, Mr. Chair, I was going to suggest that that -- what may or may not be happening on a broader and systemic scale is probably best directed to the Minister of Health and Social Services but if that's not necessarily required for this moment, then I'll not redirect it over there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay, so my next question, following up on the Member from Range Lake's questions about cost associated with agency and contract staffing, can the Minister confirm whether costs of locums -- so that's either locum nurses or locum doctors -- would that be included in that line item? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Not locum physicians if that's what you're seeking. Thank you.

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

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, I mean, one particular concern that I've heard related to the way we budget for agency nurses

is -- I think people on the front lines have a sense that there are strong attempts to limit the budget -- the regular budget for the NTHSSA so there's resistance to, for example, you know, adequate levels of staffing or putting new staffing positions in place because that would increase the budget that, you know, we're trying to keep under control and yet by not recognizing what is needed to keep the system sustainable, those costs are actually inevitable and they keep popping up in these sups which, you know, we have a very hard time refusing certainly, especially, you know, after the fact once it's been spent, but that way of budgeting creates these sort of perverse incentives to keep sort of overly squeezing our staffing models at the front end and incentivising health authorities to just sort of hire agency nurses when they realize that they need more people, which could be involved by a more sort of wholistic and sustainable staffing models that, you know, we plan ahead for and include in the main health authority budget.

So I'm wondering if -- a question to the Minister here. If these costs of agency nurses that come through the sups end up being fed back into the considerations when it comes to overall health authority budgeting that they get sort of counted so to speak, not as just sort of extra unexpected costs but as actually as fundamental costs necessary to running of the system and that that might lead to better staffing models in the first place, that would avoid us having to pay for these things after the fact. I know that's a convoluted question, but the question is is there a feedback loop given these millions of dollars of extra costs that are coming after the fact that will allow us to plan better staffing that would prevent these costs from happening in the future? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I guess I'm not sure that my observations are necessarily the same in that the Department of Health and Social Services has seen a rather exponential growth in its budget over the last sort of five years, if you will, at a growth rate or more in excess and significant than that of other departments. And largely that is driven by, well, the cost of services going up significantly but also the number of health care work staff, labour force, physicians, nurses, as well as others, for example to support the nurses that are there. So we right now, for example, I think -- or at least last week, last time I had heard, we had exactly one agency nurse in the Northwest Territories. So I don't know that -- yes, I don't know that keeping a line item when we many times will have only one is necessarily the right

response. The desire to see less use and less reliance on agency nurses is shared, I suggest, across the territory and including -- and certainly across this -- within this House, but keeping the ability to do so for emergency needs at the same time is still one that is important for services. So the number does fluctuate but, again, it was certainly at a one not long ago and may well be at or near a one right now. I mean, the bigger challenges, of course, is to determine the appropriate level of total budget for an appropriate level of services, which is a much more complicated thing than I can answer right now, but is, indeed, the work that is underway both by the health sustainability unit as well as by the health administrator and then to put those pieces together, I think that -- those questions were already answered by the health Minister today. Thank you.

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

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I can appreciate that answer, and certainly I'm not suggesting that we should sort of ban agency nurses as they might be needed in emergency situations or to fill in urgent gaps. However, my concern is if our system becomes designed to continually rely on them, and I do hope and I want to keep emphasizing that it is important work of both the health care system sustainability unit and the public administrator, to look at appropriate staffing models as part of their work, staffing levels and what kind of staff and the right numbers of staff that are needed.

I would just point out, I mean, we have heard a number of times from the health Minister and finance Minister that, you know, we only have one agency nurse in the territory but, I mean, \$2 million worth of agency nurses is more than one nurse and, you know, it does add up over time. So at any given time, I understand that there are few but it's obviously added up to \$2 million, so we are still -- there is a sizable enough reliance that it's worth looking at how we can better structure the system to avoid, when possible, needing them. So I'll leave it there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the next Member on my list, is the Member from Monfwi.

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We're talking about money that's already been spent. So you know and I know the majority of the people living in small communities are Indigenous people. And for some of the small communities, we know that without agency nurses or contract staffing for

nurses, we will be without nurses. We're not going to have any services. We have a health centre but we're not going to have any staff, nobody to look after the small communities. So I do support some of -- because of that, you know, I do support where we do need -- and here we're crying, we're asking for more doctors, we want more nurses, but small communities -- and you said it before too, small communities do matter and we do need a better health care.

So with that in mind -- with that in mind, like, for the nurses in small communities -- and I know that you said locum and physicians are not in this -- it's not part of this budget here, that \$2.4 million. So I just wanted to know and ask -- well, I know it's finance Minister, but I think I should be asking the health and social services Minister. I know it's hard and it's culture shock for newcomers to come in, but I just wanted to know -- and I know that there's a lot of colleges and universities in the south where it is Indigenous, most -- you know, there's a college of nurses in -- which is for Indigenous in Saskatchewan and in Alberta as well. So I just -- sometimes we do get lucky. We get a nurse that loves our community or that loves the region that stays for many years, you know, and they -- some of them stay until they retire or well beyond retirement, you know. But that's only few in between. It's not too often. So I just want to -- it would be nice if we can do something to recruit -- I know that in the North we don't have too many Indigenous nurses and doctors that were born and raised in the North. And if we do, then they go somewhere else in the south so I think we need to recruit more Indigenous nurses and doctors across from -- you know, like, from the south, from the colleges.

I don't know if it's -- could be part of this budget but I just wanted to know if there's any kind of a campaign that's happening between the GNWT, health and social services, or with the human resources to recruit other nationalities? Because I know if it's an Indigenous, hopefully they will want to stay because they come from -- many of them are from small communities, small -- like, from outside of a larger regional centre. So, and I know this is not -- this is old money that we're talking about; it's money already spent, but maybe for upcoming budget, if we can put something in there where -- because it's good for career too, a career opportunity for young people that are -- you know, that are within our region. So I just -- that's just -- it's more of a comment.

So maybe, A, we can keep that in mind for future reference, especially for small communities, for outside of Yellowknife, where it is hard to recruit. And we do need more nurses and sometimes it's the agency nurse

that comes in, and we don't -- and I don't think any communities would like to see their health centre shut down because there's no nurses. And agency nurses do help in many of this -- in these areas.

So another one too is that here, to provide funding for the in-territory child and family services program with NTHSSA. But it's not just TCSA, but it's probably other region as well. So is this keeping to where -- keeping the kids in the North or in the regions? Is that -- this budget, is it part of that? Because I know that a lot of time before kids were -- when they were removed from the community, they were always sent to a larger regional centre, and there's a lot of voluntarily agreement that's being -- that's taking place. Does this budget reflect that? I'm not too sure. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And first of all, I do want to commit that the human resources -- or the health recruitment unit that does -- is a shared responsibility between health and finance. More than happy to have them follow up if there -- if we can identify the specific programs that the Member's suggesting, we'll make sure they're following up and even just generally, perhaps, take an opportunity to see that we recruiting -- we do tend to recruit almost all, if not all, graduates from Aurora College, but if there's specifically some Indigenous focused programs elsewhere, that would be very helpful. So, again, I will certainly follow up with the Member and with HRU on that.

With respect to the in-territory child and family services system, it is a function of there being an increase in need but also, again, as Members noting, the costs associated with trying to have systems or programs that can keep families together, so a higher cost for preventative programs but also that can then, you know, working with a family, there's different types and different levels of agreements, voluntary services plan of care agreements up the chain and so the more can be invested sometimes to try to fix some of the structural issues that does result with more clients and with more need, there's more costs, but that -- so, yes, you know, in some cases there still will be children who do not have a place but to the extent that they can be kept with their families or in foster care within the community, which sometimes also requires more costs, then that is -- that is resulting in increased costs. And, again, it's not just Tlichó. Just that was the only entity out of the three that didn't have the opportunity or didn't have other

surplus money from elsewhere they could put toward a cost overrun. Thank you.

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

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. Yeah, thank you. It's more like a family preservation program too as well, yeah.

So another one too is that to provide funding to address the impact of costs associated with the tuberculosis outbreak, so it's probably mostly the Indigenous people here because the majority of the people that, you know, living in Yellowknife too, it's half/half but, you know, probably mostly -- I don't know. For that one, the funding, is it just only for -- was that money only assessed only Yellowknife or, like -- or was that, this cost association -- associated, was it only for Yellowknife only, or did some of this fund went to outside of Yellowknife as well?

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So although the initial declaration of the outbreak began, I believe with a case that was identified here, what ultimately wound up happening in terms of the case management and the case identification, it extended to beyond Yellowknife to the Tlichó region as well as to the Deh Cho region. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's it for this section.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Mahsi. Is there any further questions from Members? I'm going to go to the Member from the Mackenzie Delta.

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. On page 8, about substance use and addictions program for a modest \$69,000. With the high problems that we're encountering with social problems, especially alcohol and drugs, can you elaborate on what these addictions programs are entailed with this \$69,000? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, Mr. Chair, this is certainly far from being the only program or fund directed to support addictions use so happy that the Member is pointing that out.

This is one of the examples of where Health Canada came out with some additional funding and provided that funding under what is called the substance use and addictions program contribution agreement, and this one is quite specifically with respect to smoking cessation, so trying to reduce the number of individuals who are cutting back or reducing or ultimately ceasing smoking. And so it's money that's coming over the last four years. This is the current amount and it provides for tobacco sort of specific therapies, data management, and a nurse in Inuvik, registered nurse in Inuvik, that can fall under this to help provide some of those supports. Thank you.

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

**MR. NERYSOO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to thank the Minister for that detailed answer. It's encouraging to have these kinds of programs, especially when we have our younger generations populations picking up these habits, especially smoking within the small communities is so prevalent. You see these younger generations picking up these habits so thankful that, you know, these types of programs are available, should be more available, readily available within the school systems where we can attract and make the younger population more aware. Just more of a comment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Are there any other Members that have questions? Okay, thank you. Seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Health and Social Services, operations expenditures, health and social services programs, not previously authorized, \$6,022,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

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

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Health and Social Services, operations expenditures, long-term and continuing care services, not previously authorized, \$4,129,000. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Health and Social Services, operations expenditures, long-term care and continuing care services, not previously authorized, \$4,129,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

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

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Health and Social Services, operations expenditures, out of the territory services, not previously authorized, \$9,162,000. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. On the topic of out of territory hospitals and physician services, does the Minister have any sense of how this number has been changing over time? Is this typical that for a number of years now, you know, just over \$6 million we've needed to spend this much extra in out of territory physician services and hospital services, or, yeah, is there any trend or pattern that we can see? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, that's an excellent question and to my knowledge, that's exactly the kind of question that is being looked at by the health sustainability unit. I don't have the trends in the supplementary estimates document or background. I can say that this may well include some of the additional amounts that we would have incurred -- oh no, those things -- we did see certainly a bump when the evacuations took place, for example, in 2023, but that would have been dealt with in the past fiscal year. So as far as beyond that for trends, as I say, it is certainly something that's being tracked specifically by that unit. Thank you.

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

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do appreciate that answer, and I do hope they are looking at this closely. I mean, this feeds into the exact point I was making a few minutes ago, which is that I am concerned, and there's certainly practitioners within the system as well who are concerned, that the attempt to sort of tighten belts and balance budgets internally have led to a tendency to cut down on physician services that previously might have been available, at least at the Stanton Territorial Hospital if not in regional hospitals, and there's this sense, well, we can't afford it but not really recognizing that people still have to get care and we'll have to send them somewhere else for that care, but, you know, not to worry because that money will just be paid for out of sups anyway so we don't have to include it in

our budget. So that's the concern and the danger of the way this budgeting is done. So I am hoping that the work of the sustainability unit and the public administrator can sort of uncover some of these patterns and stop it, especially given that we know, based on, you know, lots of studies that have been done, that it's much better if care can be provided as close to home as possible. That it's not equal just oh, it doesn't matter, just send them to the next province, send them somewhere else, it's just the same thing. You know, there's better patient and health outcomes and lots of expenses can be prevented down the road if we can provide care at the earliest possible date and as close to home as possible. It's better for everyone and better financially. So I hope that that work can produce some results soon. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Are there any other Members that have questions? Seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Health and Social Services, operations expenditures, out of territory services, not previously authorized, \$9,162,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

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

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Health and Social Services, operations expenditures, supplementary health programs, not previously authorized, \$611,000. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, can the Minister explain why the GNWT is responsible -- still responsible for funding Metis health benefits when in a post-Daniels case world where the federal government is supposed to be responsible for this? It seems unfair that we have to shoulder that burden when it has been proven in the courts -- or tested in the courts that it is a federal responsibility. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I cannot see into the crystal ball of the federal government. I would be fascinated to know why they are not taking this on similar to, by way of comparison, the non-insured health benefits which is a benefit that is provided to Indigenous persons, or at least First Nations persons, and this program

administered by the GNWT is meant to extend a similar level of coverage. I do not know why the federal government doesn't seem to undertake this. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, you know, I commend the government for stepping up and providing this benefit when -- instead of just not -- no one providing it at all. Has the health department or intergovernmental affairs started negotiating on this or raised the issue that this -- these benefits should be paid for by Ottawa and not by Yellowknife? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the more fulsome response likely lies either with the Premier or the Minister of health. I certainly can say that in the last year, and even before that, that it is an issue that does come up at bilateral meetings with the NWT Metis Nation and that, in fact, progress in terms of at least our collective or joint advocacy is positive. The president and the Northwest Territories Metis Nation actually travelled with Minister -- our current Minister when she was last there to advocate on this very issue. So while it is a bit frustrating for all of us, it is certainly an opportunity for us to share and to raise our voices collectively. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. I have great confidence in President Bailey and our Cabinet to press this issue at the federal table.

Can the Minister explain what the cost coverage on the program is; what's driving the costs? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The projected shortfalls from this one, Mr. Chair -- sorry, we do have the base funding here built in. There is -- yes, I don't actually have great detail as to what has led to that, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure if the deputy minister can speak to it, but it may well be -- yes, sorry, I'll just pass it to the deputy minister. Thank you.

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



**MR. BILL McKAY:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. So the program is demand driven, so it is a little bit difficult to predict how much demand there will be on the system from the people that are eligible for those benefits. But just to give the Member an outline of how it's budgeted for, so there is a base budget of \$2.7 million for Metis health benefits and then the program costs, we estimate until the end of this fiscal year, will amount to about \$3.4 million. The department has a bit of a surplus under its extended health benefits budget, so that's \$257,000. So that'll be applied to the overall shortfall in this program which is \$868,000. So \$868,000, taking away the \$257,000 that the department's applying to that shortfall, gives you the sup request which is \$611,000. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Can the witness repeat the surplus for extended health benefits. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. \$257,000.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. So this is -- and this surplus exists after the changes were made to income testing extended health benefits; is that correct?

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Mr. Chair, I'm not sure -- I'm not sure, Mr. Chair, and I don't want to presume.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Minister -- sorry, to the Range Lake Member.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Well, these estimates reflect the budget we passed last year, is that correct? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, it -- yes, so it should be from 2024-2025 there is the slight surplus of \$257,000 and that's being, again, put there, so, yes, it should reflect the total impacts from anything that happened over the course of the year. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. It doesn't surprise me that there's a surplus from extended health benefits given that was the point of changing them. I'm just -- I think conceptionally it's disappointing to think you're taking money from one class of people and giving it -- to pay for the benefits of another class of people. I think, again, conceptionally that's not great. I still get plenty of complaints. I get a constituent who texts me monthly with his -- the increased costs to his medical needs because of income testing of extended health benefits, something I do not support. So I mean, like I said, conceptionally unfortunate because I think that's how many people will feel when they understand that there's a surplus from those benefits and that that surplus is being used for other benefits when everyone should be treated, you know, equally and have full access to the care they need regardless of circumstances. So thank you for that. Again, I support the Metis health benefit program. I think it -- I think we are stepping up as a government. That's a very good thing. I hope that the federal government will come to its senses and pay for this. There's a federal election upcoming, no doubt. Perhaps this is something that the Premier can write to the party leaders about to ensure we can take this off our books and get some financial flexibility into -- or sustainability into the health care system. But, yeah, I just -- I hear about this all the time, about the additional financial hardship that's been put on my constituents, and obviously that's the story for many Northerners right now and, yeah, it's just disappointing to see the numbers on the page. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Is there any other Members that want to speak to this? Okay, seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Health and Social Services, operations expenditures, supplementary health programs, not previously authorized, \$611,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

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

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Health and Social Services, operations expenditures, total department not previously authorized, \$19,901,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Please turn to page 10 for the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment, operations expenditures, corporate management, not previously authorized, \$45,000. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment, operations expenditures, corporate management, not previously authorized, \$45,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

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

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment, operations expenditures, economic diversification and business support, not previously authorized, \$145,000. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment, operations expenditures, economic diversification and business support, not previously authorized, \$145,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

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

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment, operations expenditures, minerals and petroleum resources, not previously authorized, \$818,000. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have no issue with this; I just want to know more and understand more. I see it's fully offset by the Government of Canada. Can the Minister, please, explain what the high resolution airborne geophysical survey for critical minerals is. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is \$600,000, and it is being fully offset from revenues from CanNor, and what they are doing with this is a geophysical survey

that will help enhance some of the quality of our existing geological, geophysical data, and with that, in turn, when you increase the available knowledge and information, it helps anyone that's looking around at what is in the ground to identify where there is likely to be critical mineral or other mineral deposits based on this data, and then they can go on and use that as a beginning point to hopefully come and do their own exploration. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hoorah, keep going. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Any other Members that want to make comments, general questions? Seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment, operations expenditures, minerals and petroleum resources, not previously authorized, \$818,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment, operations expenditures, total department not previously authorized, \$1,008,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Please turn to page 13 for the Department of Infrastructure.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Infrastructure, operations expenditures, energy and strategic initiatives, not previously authorized, \$76,000. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Infrastructure, operations expenditures, energy and strategic initiatives, not previously authorized, \$76,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

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

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department

of Infrastructure, operations expenditures, programs and services, not previously authorized, \$18,340,000. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Infrastructure, programs and services, not previously authorized, \$18,340,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

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

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Infrastructure, operations expenditures, regional operations, not previously authorized, \$14,720,000. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake.

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, I'll just ask these one at a time.

The first one I have a question about is the additional lease funding to address the shortfall in the general purpose office space budget. Just wondering why there was a shortfall there; it seems like something that's relatively predictable and stable. If they could give me some substantiation for that one, please. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, there's a couple of factors that can be -- that can result in the increase. First is there is -- well, primarily is that there was -- there was and continues to be a plan to reduce the overall lease footprint and to get to a place where we have less footprint and therefore less costs, and that was being built in. Unfortunately, some of that work is taking a little longer to get to, and as a result so while they have reduced the budget for leases, they ultimately found that there was base rent, then base rent escalations by landlords and also operations and maintenance costs with that. So between those two things, the numbers didn't go down. They, in fact, went up. But we are still committed in the longer term, Mr. Chair, to doing a review and to reducing the footprint. Thank you.

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

**MR. MORSE:** Okay, thank you. That's a little bit tough to hear that we're trying to save money and ended up spending more. But -- okay.

The next one I was wondering about is just the funding for the two winter roads. How are we managing to under budget for these? I mean, these are roads that we've been running for decades. We should have a good idea of the operating costs of them. Even knowing that there might be, you know, changes in -- from season to season as to different demands but I would expect that, you know, these costs are pretty significant. So is there a reason why they went up so much this year?

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, they are sometimes quite stable but last year and this year as well, but last year in particular was the first year where knowing of the low water levels and knowing also that there had been reductions even at that point in the amount of barging that came up and the year previous, the department expected and was correct in expecting that there it would need to do some additional work. So some of the things that led to much higher than usual budgeting was that there was additional flooding being used on the portages, additional flooding on all crossings in order to bring up the amount of load bearing that was available. There was widening done which, of course, takes more time, more staffing, more hours. And also some work done -- work that gets done regularly to remove trees along the pathway but with some of the wildfires, there was additional work that needed to be done to clear the areas as well as additional work that needed to be done more than just waiting year over year and doing a cycle but to actually widen the road, again, knowing there's likely to be larger trucks, more trucks, coming through. In addition, there was increased inspection being done so more staff are being put -- more time being dedicated to having folks on the roadway. And that -- well, I guess I'll stop it there, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

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

**MR. MORSE:** No further questions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Any other -- any further questions from Members? I'm going to go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Following up on my colleague's questions about shortfalls in general purpose office space leasing, can the Minister share, or does she know, to what extent are GNWT office space

leases concentrated with one commercial landlord?

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, Mr. Chair, I'm happy to have the chance to say that we didn't necessarily, you know, lose money, but the budget was reduced in the hopes that they'd be able to move forward a little faster in terms of getting this -- getting a project off the ground that can reduce our lease space.

Currently, there are 72 percent of the total GNWT lease space is leased. There is 107 individual leases across all regions of the territory. Now, whether or -- the degree to which those are all individual, we have 82 with northern landlords, or 38 percent of our space; 25 of these leases are with southern landlords, which is approximately 62 percent of the space. Thank you.

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

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you for that. But has there been analysis done specifically to what extent the value of the leases are concentrated with one single company; has that analysis been done? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I can't speak to that. I don't have that level of detail here on the supplementary estimates document. I'm certainly happy to get back to the Member maybe with my other hat on another day. Thank you.

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

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And so, I mean, the danger, of course, is that if we put all of our eggs into the basket, or many of them, most of them, of one company that's leasing us office space, we put ourselves at the mercy of cost increases, whether that's space costs or costs for various, you know, renovations and there's not much we can do about it if we're very dependent on one particular commercial landlord. So has the GNWT analyzed any risks associated with our dependence on landlords and us being at the mercy of costs that might increase as a result? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, there are, indeed, industry standards for public sectors in terms of the amount that should, you know, ideally be held both between being an owned facility versus being a leased facility. Mr. Chair, again, I don't have with me right now for the supplementary estimate document where we fall within that. My recollection was that we actually were falling within the industry standard but, again, I don't have that here to confirm. There is a significant difference as between Yellowknife in particular, where there is a different market for office space as compared to, in particular, small communities and even regional centres. So, Mr. Chair, again, I'm more than happy to have a much longer conversation about leasing. It's certainly one, as I'm indicating here, that I've got my eye on. The Department of Infrastructure manages it for all other departments which makes an added complication in that there's different needs depending on those services of different departments. So I can say that when leases do come due, they are publicly tendered, and so we are seeking to get good market rates. And one good thing in Yellowknife. Which does tend to be the place where people are concerned about who we are leasing from, there is a greater amount of space available which makes it more easier to get a better market bid. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MS. MORGAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And the Minister preemptively answered my next question which is whether it's a competitive process when we decide to lease general purpose office space, but. So it is publicly tendered.

So my final question, then, is does the Minister know if we are currently paying rent in any buildings that are currently empty? So perhaps we've moved office space somewhere else, but are there cases where we move to a different office space and continue to pay rent in the previous space which sits empty? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I can't say for sure one way or the other. I would not be surprised if there are occasions that there may be some gap in time if services are moving one way or the other. I will certainly have to get that confirmed. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Next on my list to speak is the Member from Great Slave.

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. On page 14, there is funding to support an increase in utility costs at 3.7, almost \$3.8 million. I'm wondering if the Minister can speak to a substantiation on this noting which regions saw spikes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I mean, I see, I believe utility rates would have seemed to have been changing across different regions both in terms of the electricity costs as well as transportation of fuel. So you may well see some higher costs, for example, in the Sahtu, but I -- again, the breakdown I have, shows as compared between the budget versus costs, and we have increases in the Beaufort Delta, in the Deh Cho -- particularly in Beaufort Delta, and Deh Cho, North Slave. Those three are showing right now as being over their budgets. Thank you.

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

**MS. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, yeah, I guess I just wanted to dig a little deeper on that. I would have expected this might have been the Sahtu with the pressures they've been facing but it's interesting to hear it's across more regions than just that.

So for edging into close to \$4 million, much like previous questions in our committee this afternoon, I'm curious what kind of budgeting estimates have been perhaps not been adequate for our needs and anticipating maybe inflationary pressures to see such an increase? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I mean, utilities costs can and do include heating, electricity, water, sewage, garbage collection, so there are over 400 different individual assets that are managed by the Department of Infrastructure and depending on each community, there are some changes. One that I'd certainly point to quickly is the heating costs and obviously heating fuel, the cost both of providing it and then the actual costs have been very volatile over the last several years, including last year. Electricity costs obviously saw a bit of an increase already in July. And water/sewage may be dependent upon individual municipalities and what costs

they are charging, so if there's been cost increases in some of the regional centres, that would then impact potentially on utilities costs. And yes, so those are just sort of my initial responses, Mr. Chair. Again, it maybe is a bit -- yes, in terms of budgeting that, there's -- this would be exactly a good example of what is forced growth but also when costs spike towards the end of the year, the forced growth process doesn't necessarily have the opportunity to take that into account and we can still see the department coming in short here late in the fiscal year. Thank you.

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

**MS. REID:** That's all right. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Next on my list I have is the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Going back to the office space leases, of those -- the northern arrangements we have, or arrangements with northern landlords, does the Minister know how many of those are Indigenous landlords? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Mr. Chair, I'm able to say that I don't think we track that, the reason being that we don't currently have an operating definition for an Indigenous business per se and as a result of that, it's not easy to say the individual landlord is, in fact, is Indigenous. There's times where, for a development corporation for example, is an easier answer, but there are other businesses that may well be owned, operated, or partially owned or partially operated, and we don't right now have that definition so I'm not able to track that. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Do we have an idea of how many are dev corps, then, or owned by local bands or other Indigenous governments? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, again, I don't have that in the materials in front of me on the sup. I can say anecdotically that I'm aware that, for example, communities outside of the regional centres, so

small communities does -- occasionally there are opportunities to work with a community band or Indigenous organization who may have some land or some lease space available but, again, as a broad comment I will have to get back to the Member. I'm happy to do that. Again, I actually do -- I do find the leasing space one that I'm interested in, Mr. Chair. I just don't have that level of information for the purposes of the supplementary appropriation. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** I appreciate that offer from the Minister. You know, this is an area that is kind of a very fertile ground for economic development for Indigenous governments, either through dev corps or other enterprises like that. I know anecdotically, as well, that a number of First Nations have buildings, commercial buildings, that the GNWT does, in fact, rent and, you know, sometimes increases like this are representative of rents that haven't gone up in a decade because they've been basically frozen as a result of a favourable rate to the GNWT and then you get, like, a big kickover like this. So I think we just have to be careful about how we characterize some of these things. Like, it's nice to own and operate our own buildings but sometimes there's a real economic upside, especially in nonmarket-based communities to allowing, especially local Indigenous authorities, to build on their own land and use that land to generate income. It can be a real game changer. And so I wouldn't want to see us, you know, back off leasing as a government without taking those things into consideration of how important it can be as a source of revenue for local authorities when there are limited options and it -- you know, it means we could support Indigenous companies in a different way that's just grants or secondments or things like that, right. Like, we can actually be a client, be a customer, and -- and, yeah, participate in economic reconciliation as a result. So I think the Minister agrees with me on that. And -- but, yeah, I just -- I want to make sure we're characterizing our leasing is not just what has often been said in this House, right, pointing the finger at certain large land holders. I think that hasn't always been good for our reputation as a place that's friendly to business because in the North, sometimes you don't have a ton of competition and a ton of different options to choose from, and I would love to see the space more filled with things like dev corps building commercial spaces and things like that, so we're not building expensive government facilities at very expensive public procurement rates. Instead we can rely on, you know, leased spaces in

private sector builds that are far cheaper to operate than building fresh and we can save our dollars for debt reduction or program services, whatever have you. But, yeah, I don't like -- I just want to move away from that implication that, you know, we have bad actors just because they are large businesses that operate in the Northwest Territories. I think that's an unfair characterization. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Is there any other Members that want to speak to this line item? Okay, seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Infrastructure, operations expenditures, regional operation, not previously authorized, \$14,705,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

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

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Infrastructure, operations expenditures, total department not previously authorized, \$33,121,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Please turn to page 15 for the Department of Justice.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Justice, operations expenditures, services to government, not previously authorized, \$31,000. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Justice, operations expenditures, services to government, not previously authorized, \$31,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

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

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Justice, operations expenditures, total department not previously authorized, \$31,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Please turn to page 16 for the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, operations expenditures, directorate, not previously authorized, \$108,000. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, operations expenditures, directorate, not previously authorized, \$108,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, operations expenditures, sports, recreation, and youth, not previously authorized, \$394,000. Are there any questions? Seeing no further questions.

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, operations expenditures, sports, recreation, and youth, not previously authorized, \$394,000. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

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

Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, operations expenditures, total department not previously authorized, \$502,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Members, there is a schedule on page 17 that details borrowing authorization, and on page 19 that detail supplementary reserve impact. Are there any questions to these schedules? I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. After this appropriation, how close will we be to the federally imposed borrowing limit? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. \$3.6 million.

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

**MR. TESTART:** That's very close, Mr. Chair. I know the government has put in a submission to increase the borrowing limit. Can the Minister

provide the House with an update on that. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, Mr. Chair, so earlier in the fall, or I guess now in the fall, I had written to make that request. I have recently had an opportunity to be in contact with the Minister of Finance for the federal government who has confirmed that the matter is moving forward. We don't have a final confirmation. There is an internal process within the federal government that they go through, but I understand that that is underway. So I had hoped to have a final confirmation of that obviously before we are now in our own budget session but we are confident, given the information that I've received and that the deputy minister has received from his counterpart, that we will receive the amount that we had requested. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. What was the amount requested; is the Minister able to share that? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** \$3.1 billion, Mr. Chair.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Is that inclusive or additional? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** That would be the then total, Mr. Chair.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, does increases to the borrowing limit, do they require parliamentary approval, or is this something that could be done at the treasury board? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** It would go to the treasury board, Mr. Chair, and it requires an

Order in Council and it's that process that I gather we're now waiting for. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** So for the layperson, then, a prorogued parliament is not going to delay this at all, so we should be able to move forward on this regardless of what happens in the House of Commons; is that an accurate summation of where we're at? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** That is accurate, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. So I mean, I think it's impossible not to draw the inevitable comparison to the other two territories which are at \$700 million and their borrowing limit at \$600 million and, you know, if everything goes as planned, we'll be at \$3.1 billion. Has the Minister had any -- well, I guess we have a lot of smart people at that table. Is there, beyond the historic infrastructure deficit and all of that, is there a reason why they've been able to kind of stick to their borrowing limits without requiring an increase versus our circumstances where we keep running up the credit card? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Mr. Chair, I can say it is my understanding that the others may also be in some process right now. Obviously, that's not mine to speak to or to confirm one way or the other, but I gather there may be other requests being made. And as a broad brushstroke, you know, again, there's differences on a number of different fronts, whether it's the connectivity issues in the Yukon being less pronounced compared to here, both in terms of transportation as well as energy infrastructures, and what that often does to cost overages that we see here or whether it's, you know, in relation to, you know, the level of wildfire impacts that we have seen here which were certainly not present in Nunavut, for example, or as perhaps as acute as in the Yukon. So, Mr. Chair, I mean, I think that would be a very long analysis to get into. I'm certainly conscious of it so I don't want to discount the comparison, but just to say that there's -- again, there's a number of factors that contribute to the situation we find ourselves in and, again, happy to speak to that further. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. I mean, I have issues with, like, the debt ceiling in the first place. I think it's a -- it makes sense -- if you're a territory it makes -- an autonomous governing territory, it makes a lot of sense if you're basically a province, which we are. So anyway, we have to do what we have to do.

Is this going to affect -- we currently have the -- the GNWT has a double A minus credit rating from Fitch and an AA2 from Moody's. Is this going to impact our credit rating at all? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the -- some of the things that contribute to the credit rating, and the credit rating is what then allows us to then borrow at a good rate, have been things that have been cited, when I review them every -- whenever they come up with their updates, is the existence of the territorial formula financing from which we receive 70 percent of our revenues, so the fact that that exists and is relatively stable. And, you know, add to that the fact that another 10 or so percent of our revenues continue to also come from federal pots. Obviously, a little more variability, for example, in the Canada health transfer but at the same time fairly stable that we will be receiving something if it does vary a bit year to year. Also another factor that is considered, Mr. Chair, is our ability to service our debts so we have been consistently, certainly in the last five years, even with all of the challenges, sitting at around 1.5 to 2 percent of total revenues is where our debt is, so it's actually an amount that is on the lower end as compared to other provinces and territories. And in addition, Mr. Chair, I believe last year, after the announcement of the Restoring Balance initiative, mention was made of the fact that there's an ongoing effort to keep an eye on total expenditures and revenues and to try to bring that more in line with our total revenues and the fact that we have a fiscal responsibility policy that creates some transparency on markers such as when we hit the -- that 120 cushion, such as the -- you know, not putting our royalties towards operations, so on and so forth. So there's more than just the fact of hitting the debt limit.

Can I crystal ball what might be seen here overall? No. At the same time, Mr. Chair, we are in a situation where with this -- you know, with the current budget, that we have already



progressed to finding \$106.6 million in savings so -- and we are doing that even in the context of significant variation year to year of challenges. So we're managing and weathering some pretty significant challenges. We're doing so by finding reductions. I guess maybe I should be giving my pitch to Fitch and to Moody's right now and not to the Member, but all of which is to say I'm hopeful that we won't see change. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** I think that's a very optimistic pitch, and I'm sure our -- the agencies would like that. I might disagree on some of the finer points. So let's say worst case scenario, we don't get the increase for whatever reason, you know, there's a bizarre snap election, treasury board doesn't get their stuff done, we got to wait until there's a new government and a new election -- national election. What happens if we hit that debt wall; what's the process that happens afterwards? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, Mr. Chair, Ministers continue to be Ministers so if there is some new uncertainty, the first thing that I'm doing is phoning the Minister and asking why this isn't getting done a little faster. And so my hope is that we are not going to be in that situation. We are still projecting to be under our limit at the end of this fiscal year so we have, you know -- and then we are still -- would then beginning the April 1st year with a new appropriation. So, again, expecting to remain fine and going into the next year as well as of April 1st. It's just that we don't -- we wind up not having the cushion for flexibility, so I'm not concerned about running into that wall right at this moment. And, again, there's some other levers, in particular speaking to the federal government about the timing of the issuance of the Order in Council, before we need worry about running into the wall. Thank you.

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

**MR. TESTART:** Thank you. Well, that gives comfort around the borrowing limit. But, I mean, we blew through this supplementary appropriation to the tune of \$188 million, so I think planning to stay with that \$3.2 million wiggle room we have is probably not going to happen. I don't think there's -- the evidence will tell us that it's not, so. But anyway, I'm confident that things are going to go through. On a

personal level, I'm not worried about this. I think it just adds extra steps and makes it harder to do our jobs here if we hit that wall; it doesn't make it impossible. So I do thank the Minister for answering these questions and hopefully giving comfort to anyone who's curious about these processes, that they are well in hand and we should have a higher borrowing limit soon. Thank you.

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

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just the question I have around this, I know that the fiscal responsibility policy or the finding balance -- I always mix those two up -- has kind of policies related to the supplementary reserve but I'm just wondering are there policies that govern supplementary appropriations generally, what can come forward, what can't, and have we -- yeah, that's my first question, funding policies.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** There are, Mr. Chair. It's in the financial administration manual. I would suggest directing that to the deputy minister for some detail, please.

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

**MR. BILL McKAY:** Yeah, thank you, Mr. Chair. So as the Minister mentioned, we do have the financial administration manual which outlines for departments what is -- properly falls within as the definition of supplementary appropriation. So that has to be something that isn't forced growth. It's emergent or unforeseen expenditures and the costs cannot be offset with -- internally within the budget. So they have to meet those conditions in order to go forward. And I would also note that all of those go to management board secretariat which analyzes the submission, taking into account the supplementary appropriation that is -- or supplementary estimates that are appropriated for at the beginning of the budget, so in this case it's \$35 million, as well as that definition. So there's pretty rigorous oversight over whether they fit that supplementary appropriation definition before they go to FMB with the MBS recommendation. Thank you.

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

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I appreciate that information and that reassurance. The reason I bring the point up is

just that, you know, overall looking at this, it is difficult seeing sups of this level come forward year after year and just knowing that we're hitting our debt limit. I mean, I heard one Member kind of suggest they were going to maybe make a protest vote related to this. I mean, I'm not suggesting I'm going to do the same but it -- I do want to kind of register a concern about some of the trends that I'm seeing. And, I mean, I'm guessing that all the sups that came forward met the policies, but there were concerns raised by a number of Members, you know, through a review of these supplementary estimates, that it seems like we're just kind of underbudgeting and we're making up for it with sups and that's a trend that's going on. And so I'm wondering if the Minister or her staff could comment on what we might be able to do going forward to tighten things up and to try and budget appropriately and certainly reduce this as much as possible. Maybe we need new policies, and that's something I could look into. Or stronger policies.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I did, after some of the discussions last week, just over the weekend, ask to look at how the two supplementary appropriations have come forward, if we could sort of categorize them to have some data that helps us better understand, I'm certainly happy to take this to Members and share with them on a go-forward basis and with any future supplementary appropriations that may be sought over the life of this government, just to help understand what is driving the different supplementary requests. I can say that we wound up about -- over a hundred million of it really is in what's contractual negotiations, and so that would be the conclusion of the collective agreement because it would be off cycle and would not necessarily have been built in to the departments' budgets. It does get built into the fiscal framework which is a little different. So when we plan on how much borrowing needs to happen, we can plan around what we anticipate the conclusion of that agreement to be, not necessarily knowing exactly what the amounts might be year to year. So there will be some variance there. But that's a significant amount, obviously, of the changes here. And that's not the only one. If there's lease changes over the course of the year, that's another one that might be a contractual agreement. And anyways, as I say, Mr. Chair, I'm very happy to share this kind of analysis with the Members. It might just help give a sense of what is driving some of the change.

The other big one, Mr. Chair, is the idea of emergent issues. So this is, you know, impacts from low water, impacts from fire suppression activities, impacts in past years from floods, impacts from -- on winter roads. So some of those quite distinct and unique items that come up, that makes up \$87.3 million. So that's a significant cost driver that is leading to supplementary appropriations being very high.

Budget shortfalls, I agree I'd be much more concerned about. We do monitor variation -- variances at the department level as well as at the Department of Finance level and then up to the management board -- or financial management board. But, yes, certainly always happy to consider if there's other ways to do that, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

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

**MR. MORSE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, no, I'm not going to hound the department on it further or belabour the point, but we really do need to tighten things up. I mean, times are -- we're right at the debt ceiling. I actually -- I mean, it is -- as the previous Member spoke to, I mean, it seems like it's necessary to raise the debt ceiling at this time but you have to start asking the question how long are we going to keep doing this. We can -- like, the more deeper and deeper and deeper we go into debt, the more that we spend our money servicing debt and, you know, I don't need to lecture accountants and financial experts about this but just wanted to kind of register the concern, and I do hope that we can start to tighten this up, reduce this, follow finding balance as much as possible -- or is it restoring balance? Restoring Balance, I'm sorry. There's a lot of policies papers, and it's hard to keep track of them all. But, yeah, Restoring Balance is definitely a good goal. I hope we can do better next year. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. Next on my list I have is Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of things I wanted to pick up where my colleague for Range Lake had left off.

With respect to the \$1.3 billion request, because essentially that's the package of request if we're -- if I understood it correctly, the debt wall is at \$1.8 billion and I believe the finance Minister wishes to get us to the \$3.1 billion level, which in their about way, the math must be \$1.3 billion. Can you explain on what the pitch is on that? And I'm not looking for the 20-hour presentation, I'm literally looking for it as what are you asking for? Is it a one-sentence

email saying, dear national finance Minister, please raise my debt limit to \$3.1 billion? I mean, it must say something a little deeper than that, some substantiation. Maybe if you could elaborate what the package in essence is or how the request goes about. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, it is a formal letter that is written. I don't have it here since I was not anticipating necessarily to speak to that with respect to the contents of the supplementary appropriation requests. I can say we did identify some of the key pressure points that we've seen over the last five years, the wildfires, for instance, flooding two years in a row, wildfires over the course of multiple years, the costs of those that are incurred often have to get carried and carried over while we are waiting for DFAA funding to come back in, and some of those costs are born entirely by the GNWT. Pointing obviously, as well, to the health care sector which is one that is being seen as a pressure point across Canada, but we don't, then, as has been pointed out, have that flexibility that other jurisdictions -- provinces might have. And, you know, pointing also, too, to when there are cost changes that, again, inflation and an interest rate -- well interest rates and then inflation and then interest rates and what that did to projects, again, across the country. There were multiple provinces that have seen cost overruns and challenges. When we see them, we see them often particularly acutely, so pointing to all of those things. And then, Mr. Chair, speaking to the sort of -- what sort of the upcoming needs might be and that would be, you know, essentially what the pitch becomes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do believe in the concept of Restoring Balance. In other words, I don't factually flake what they're -- the policy is, per se, but I do believe fiscal prudent management is important which is, in other words, why spending of money, an evaluation of what we're doing. Does it become irrelevant if the government was to receive the additional \$1.3 billion extension to our borrowing limit, seeing how that exercise should be embedded in every element of government but those targets and principles aligned in that initial letter, does it become moot? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I hope I understood correctly whether or not fiscal -- the attempt to have a fiscal strategy that is premised on balance is moot, if we get a borrowing limit increase. If that's so, Mr. Chair, I would say no. The fiscal strategy is really how we propose to manage the available revenues of government over the course of the four years balanced against projected expenses over the four years. And, Mr. Chair, it's certainly been -- you know, we can look back over the course of 20 years and see that sort of slow steady growth of the debt and its little spikes and then, you know, resulting increase to the debt limit. What we are seeing right now, and projected for the life of this government, is that that debt growth does seem to flatten out and that if we get an increase to the debt limit, while that gives us flexibility, flattening out the increase on debt means that we are not then putting, you know, \$60 million towards servicing that debt.

We do have some long-term debt built in. The Deh Cho Bridge, for instance, is a big one, and it -- you know, we have a bridge that is contributing significantly to the transportation sector in the Northwest Territories. When the debt was taken on, it was tied to CPI. For a long time, it was low. These last few years, it has not been low. And so we have been paying more there.

All of which is to say, Mr. Chair, that we want to continue to provide all of the services and programs that we have. We want to be doing that from within an envelope of revenues that is fairly predictable. If we look at TFF and if you consider that our own source revenues are not very predictable and not very great in terms of how much we get, we want to provide those services over the long-term to do it with what we have and to do that in a long-term, sustainable way, which is what the Restoring Balance fiscal strategy is premised on. The borrowing limit increase gives us flexibility for the last couple of years, we think have an operating surplus, and then some crisis or another befalls us, and we want to ensure that we have that flexibility built in. I'll stop there, Mr. Chair. I'm conscious of time. Thanks.

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

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to reaffirm around the \$1.3 billion further request, I'm wondering is there -- again, just for clarity, is there any project built into this number; so in other words, is the number \$1.3 billion predicated on saying this is our contribution towards the Taltson Expansion; this number is being used for furthering the

Mackenzie Valley Highway; this number is based on us continuing or building a foothold into the infrastructure that will start the Slave Geological Province Road up toward the Bathurst -- our side of the Bathurst direction? So curious on that. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. No, and it's not. I think that that's actually -- it's a good question, and it's one that -- it's important, actually, that they not be conflated, I'd suggest, in that we still want to be able to go to the federal government, particularly with the nation building scale work, the kind of infrastructure that provinces, you know, arguably not taken for granted in an expressed way but have and have at their avail that were built, whether it's a national railway, whether it's a national highway, whether it's capital level airports, ports, you know, pipelines, whatever it might be, the North as a whole has significantly of it, and what we have was built 60 years ago and hasn't necessarily been maintained. And some of the responsibility for that gets downloaded to the GNWT over time while still not necessarily having the front end of revenues available to us to do the upkeep and with -- and now morphs perhaps into a bit of a conversation about territorial formula financing and just how much of that upkeep is built into that or not, but it's definitely not the idea of having a borrowing limit to take on a reasonable and manageable amount of debt, which, again, we are still servicing that debt in a reasonable comparison to revenues. That is different from going to the federal government to say we have nation scale projects that we want you to be involved in at the table. So I definitely want to keep the two of them separate. Thank you.

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

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm curious on how our debt management will change in the context of borrowing. So in other words, if we borrow money we have to pay more. So I'm just curious on how that strategy's been developed and laid out and would it be part of the business case proposal of the additional \$1.3 billion request on top of the \$1.8 billion debt limit? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, if we borrow more, we have to pay more but, Mr. Chair, the limit is just the

maximum amount that we can borrow, not necessarily money that we are, in fact, borrowing, so that -- what would be proposed for -- to be available for borrowing comes through in the budget every year so you will see the -- that there's -- in the main estimates, one of the front end pages has the proposed borrowing plan and that is what's -- where it is reflecting amounts that are anticipated year to year, long-term debt and short-term debt. That's the portion that we would see potentially, in fact, being borrowed, not the borrowing limit itself. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I'm going to go to the member from Yellowknife Centre.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Seeing my time is ticking away, what I'd do is I'll point into two areas. The first is that it does seem risky that we're almost -- almost, I know not exactly so I'm not trying to give you that impression, but almost doubling our current debt with the addition. That does sound scary by any means. Risky, if not. The other thing is is the other aspect of concern that if we're not borrowing it based on principles of us becoming active partners in our business case, I'm surprised we're asking for so much. And the last piece I'll say, Mr. Chairman, is that while memory doesn't serve me very well on this particular point, in the sense of nostalgia I seem to remember my first GNWT budget was in the range of \$800 million and change. So we're borrowing more than the first budget I remember with a \$300 million debt limit at that time. So a lot has changed in just over 20 years. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you. I take that as a comment. I'm going to go back to the Member from Range Lake -- or sorry?

**MR. HAWKINS:** Just more so around the risk management side of it. Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I certainly have looked back at data and charts going all the way to 2005, and there's a few years which is right around the time when the mines were being built that things were relatively flat, but the increase over the 16th Assembly, the 17th Assembly, the 18th Assembly show a steady -- in fact, 16th has a particularly strong spike up, and then a sort of steady increase in debt levels through the 17th and 18th. 19th, again, sort of steady the first couple of years, spikes up a little over the wildfire year, not surprisingly, and now we are, as of this moment and projecting forward, looking to level that out.

So, I mean, I can't necessarily compare dollar for dollar what might have been the budget at one time some time ago but just in terms of that debt, the growth of the debt, it does, as I say, have -- you know, there is a trajectory that you can look at. We then can also look at the gap or a lack of gap between revenues and expenditures, and that, too, over time tends to be pretty similar. You will see that we -- again, devolution saw a little bit of a bump in terms of revenues, but expenditures very quickly caught up in the 18th Assembly. And again, we're trying to create a bit of space now, be really one of the first times we create some consistent and intentional space between our revenues and expenditures. So the risk management of that, Mr. Chair, I -- you know, again, that's largely what Restoring Balance is premised on, is trying to create a culture and an approach that is about not simply increasing even with a debt limit increase. I realize the time; it's probably run out, Mr. Chair. It was kind of a complex question; I was trying to summarize as quickly as I could. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Okay, thank you. Is there any further questions on these schedules from Members? Okay, thank you. Seeing no further questions, please turn to page 18.

Government of the Northwest Territories Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, Department of Finance, revised borrowing authorization, total government borrowing authorization, proposed adjustments, \$50 million. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Thank you, committee. Do you agree that you have concluded consideration of tabled Document 279-20(1), Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** I'd like to turn to the member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

COMMITTEE MOTION 72-20(1):  
CONCURRENCE MOTION – TABLED  
DOCUMENT 279-20(1): SUPPLEMENTARY  
ESTIMATES (OPERATIONS  
EXPENDITURES), NO. 2, 2024-2025,  
CARRIED

**MR. RODGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I move that consideration of Tabled Document 279-20(1), Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, be now concluded and that the

tabled Document 279-20(1) be reported and recommended as ready for further consideration in formal session through the form of an appropriation bill. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon):** Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? Okay, motion carried. Thank you. Tabled Document 279-20(1) Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2024-2025, will be reported as ready for consideration in formal session through the form of an appropriation bill.

---Carried

Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing before us. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witnesses from the chambers.

Thank you. What is the wish of the committee? I'm going to go to the member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

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

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

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Report of Committee of the Whole. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

### Report of Committee of the Whole

**MR. EDJERICON:** Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 279-20(1), and that motion's carried and that Tabled Document 279-20(1) is concluded, and that the House concur and these estimates are as amended. And that an appropriation bill be based thereon be introduced without delay. And Mr. Speaker, I move that the Report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Can I have a seconder? Ah, may as well do it. The Member from Range

Lake. All those in favour? Opposed?  
Abstentions? Motion passed.

---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  
Tuesday, February 11th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer or Reflection
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
5. Replies to the Budget Address (Day 4 of 7)
6. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
7. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
8. Returns to Oral Questions
  - Oral Question 475-20(1), Budgeting Process for Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority
9. Acknowledgements
10. Oral Questions
11. Written Questions
12. Returns to Written Questions
13. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
14. Petitions
15. Tabling of Documents
16. Notices of Motion
17. Motions
18. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
19. First Reading of Bills
20. Second Reading of Bills
21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
  - 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 Tuesday, February 11th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 5:34 p.m.