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The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker

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Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Friday, February 28, 2025****Members Present**

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

The House met at 10:01 a.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (HON. SHANE THOMPSON): I would like to thank Ms. Cleary for the opening and blessing today.

Colleagues, before we get into our daily business, we have a bunch of Grade 5 and 6 students from Weledeh Catholic School. We'll behave ourselves really well, so these young people will say they want to be here in this House in 10, 15 years. So thank you very much for coming and attending.

Ministers' statements. Minister of Finance.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 102-20(1):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES' SUCCESS WITH CANADIAN
RADIO-TELEVISION AND
TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
ADVOCACY

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, today, I would like to highlight the significant strides we have made in advocating for better telecommunications services in the Northwest Territories. Our work with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, or CRTC, has led to transformative changes that will benefit all residents of the Northwest Territories.

On January 16th, 2025, the CRTC announced a groundbreaking decision to introduce a universal subsidy for internet services in the North. This decision marks a pivotal moment in our journey towards digital equity, ensuring that every household in the Northwest Territories can access affordable internet services. This subsidy will ultimately help bridge the gap between the high cost of internet in the Northwest Territories and the more affordable rates enjoyed by our southern counterparts.

The Government of the Northwest Territories has been a steadfast advocate for this change

and our participation in the CRTC's proceedings has been instrumental in shaping this outcome. This subsidy will alleviate some of the financial burden on our residents and promote greater access to essential online services, education, and economic opportunities.

The GNWT advocacy work also contributed to Northwestel joining the federal Connecting Families program in the fall of 2023. Through this initiative, 1,870 households in the Northwest Territories had the opportunity to access highspeed broadband internet services for \$20 per month. This program is also a testament to our commitment to ensuring that every family, regardless of financial situation, can stay connected.

Mr. Speaker on February 13th, 2025 I met with Ms. Nirmala Naidoo, the CRTC Commissioner for Northwest Territories and Alberta, and Ms. Joanne T. Levy, the CRTC Commissioner for Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and commended their recent decisions to improve the quality and reliability of internet services in the North and to hold service providers accountable for their services.

Furthermore, the CRTC has mandated improvements to Northwestel's wholesale connect service, which are meant to enhance competition and consumer choice in the North.

Mr. Speaker, I am also proud to highlight that our CRTC advocacy has also furthered our commitment to Indigenous reconciliation. The CRTC's recent policy decisions include measures to advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, such as establishing a new Indigenous relations team, dedicated to ensuring that the needs and perspectives of Indigenous communities are reflected in all its work. This team will facilitate better engagement with Indigenous peoples and support their participation in CRTC proceedings.

Additionally, the CRTC has improved the broadband fund to include an Indigenous funding stream, specifically designed to support Indigenous-owned internet service providers in developing telecommunications infrastructure. These initiatives will promote digital equity,

decrease the digital divide, and advance economic reconciliation by enabling Indigenous communities to build and manage their own telecommunications services.

Mr. Speaker, these achievements are the result of dedicated efforts by the GNWT, by Indigenous and regional governments, northern businesses, advocacy groups, and private citizens. We have worked to advocate for the needs of our residents, and these recent announcements are a testament to the power of collaboration and persistence.

The GNWT will continue to participate in the CRTC's proceedings to ensure that the implementation of the retail internet subsidy is effective and equitable. We will provide feedback on subscriber eligibility, the amount of the subsidy, and the disbursement process to ensure that the subsidy reaches those who need it most.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude to the CRTC for their commitment to improving telecommunications in the Northwest Territories. We are making significant strides towards a more connected and equitable future for all residents of the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Finance. Ministers' statements. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 103-20(1):
COMMUNITY GOVERNMENT FUNDING
POLICY IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

HON. VINCE MCKAY: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to update Members on the implementation of new community government funding allocations that will come into effect April 2025.

MACA distributes over \$110 million in annual funding through the community government funding policy. While this funding was never intended to cover 100 percent of community funding costs, the funding helps community governments cover the costs of core programs and services like clean drinking water, local roads, recreation, and public safety.

Mr. Speaker, these policies have remained unchanged in over 15 years. In 2024, MACA undertook a comprehensive review of the policies in collaboration with elected officials and administrative staff from 17 community governments, as well as representatives from the Northwest Territories Association of Communities and the Local Government Administrators of the Northwest Territories. The review recommended updates to the funding

policies and allocations to bring more transparency and to align funding more effectively with community needs and activities.

In 2023, the Ministerial funding policies were updated to better reflect the current costs of typical community programs and services, allowing funding to be allocated fairly and equitably. These policies also uphold the decision-making authority of elected community councils, allowing them to prioritize programs and services that best meet the needs of their residents.

Over the past year, MACA has been working to implement these changes. The department engaged with 28 of 32 community governments to discuss the details and gather further feedback on various implementation options. I also met with the community leaders to hear their perspectives and insights firsthand.

Mr. Speaker, these updates do not introduce new funding for community governments. As noted, distribution models has remained unchanged for over 15 years. During this time, some community governments have received funding levels exceeding over 100 percent of the standard costs.

These adjustments are being made to ensure that all community governments receive a fair and equitable share of these funds. When the new allocations are implemented on April 1st, some community governments will experience increases in their funding, while others will receive a decrease. These updates are the result of extensive engagement over many years. Some community governments welcome these changes while others have concerns.

I have heard from leaders who are worried about funding reductions, particularly in smaller communities with less financial flexibility. At the same time, I have also heard from community governments that have been underfunded for years and has waited long overdue correction. We took these perspectives seriously, made changes to the policies based on our consultations, and are now moving forward with implementation.

To allow for a smooth transition, operations and maintenance funding levels will remain unchanged for the next three years, except for community governments funded over a 100 percent. That will be reduced to 100 percent giving local governments time to assess priorities and adjust accordingly.

To address longstanding funding disparities, changes to the community public infrastructure and water and waste services funding will be phased in over three years, starting April 1st, 2025. This is being injected as much-needed

capital dollars and funding to support core services.

Based on the feedback received, MACA will also make further adjustments to the CPI policy to help address recruiting challenges related to staff housing needs. Additionally, MACA will undertake further analysis of the water and sewer rates with the community governments to ensure this core service remains affordable to residents, meaning no immediate changes to water rates will be required at this time.

Funding sustainable municipal services is a shared responsibility across all levels of government. MACA remains committed to advocating for increased funding to ensure local governments to have the necessary resources for core municipal services. Each community government must make its own decisions about what services to provide and how to fund any costs beyond what is covered by MACA's core funding services. We will also continue to work with those who have unspent capital funds to support them in implementing their priority projects.

Mr. Speaker, community governments play a vital role in delivering essential services across the NWT. MACA remains committed to ensuring that they have the tools, resources, and funding required to meet the needs of the residents. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife North.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 531-20(1): GRAND OPENING OF SNOWKING'S WINTER FESTIVAL CASTLE

MS. MORGAN: Mr. Speaker, long live the King. I'm not referring to the one across the pond but the one across the bay, Yellowknife Bay. Long live the Snowking and the Annual Snowking Festival.

Tomorrow everyone is welcome to come down to the snow castle for the grand opening and the ceremonial smashing open of the snow door starting at noon and featuring the Yellowknives Dene Drummers. It's free admission tomorrow.

The castle is a place of wonder, joy, and pure fun for kids and kids at heart of all ages. You can take a spin down the ice slides. And I saw there are some extra steep ones this year for the daredevils out there. You can enjoy live music and puppetry and marvel at the carvings

made out of snow and ice. The International Snow Carving Symposium is also happening this weekend, so you can watch top level carvers from around the world as they craft giant snow sculptures from start to finish.

This is a special year. It's version XXX of the snow castle, which makes it sound racy, but it means it's the 30th anniversary of this well-loved festival. It's been 30 years since Snowking started making snow forts for his kids outside his houseboat on the bay, and it quickly became a community project. It turns out lots of people love to play in the snow, and so the annual project has attracted a loyal team of carpenters, artists, and performers, and countless volunteers.

It has also lured people like myself away from their office jobs. I was once a full-time castle crew member for eight winters, and it's been one of the greatest experiences of my life and the best work environment I've ever had. All team members get to incorporate their own ideas and creativity, everyone is encouraged to take risks, hopefully not fall off any ladders, but to experiment with new designs, take on new roles and challenge themselves. And if it doesn't work out, then it will all melt away in the spring and it's a blank slate for next year. That kind of environment not only brings out excellence from its workers, but it brings an entire community together.

To find the snow castle, you go down to Old Town and turn right at the Woodyard Brew Pub, and while you're at it stop in and enjoy some of their limited edition Snowking XXX lager created especially for this anniversary year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 532-20(1): WORKER'S SAFETY COMPENSATION COMMISSION COVERAGE GAPS FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, first responders are real life super heroes. They run towards danger to save lives using incredible skills few possess. We rely on them to protect us and they, in turn, rely on us to do all we can to prioritize their safety and well-being because unlike in comic books and action movies, there are no super powers that can make them immune to illness and injury.

When wounded warriors stepped up to provide easier access to services for firefighters, particularly regarding mental health, it revealed a gap that showed PTSD was not covered by

WSCC legislation. This gap also revealed several cancers which firefighters are increasingly afflicted with that are also not covered; and, that the latency periods for presumed coverage was too long for those that are currently included in the legislation. An update to this legislation is therefore required to ensure WSCC has all the policies needed to ensure acquiring treatment for cancer is streamlined and more benefits and services are available to firefighters and their families.

In this process to update WSCC legislation and bring it in line with other jurisdictions in Canada, such as British Columbia and Alberta who do provide this coverage, who are working to improve the lives of their workers and compensation, firefighters are advocating for changes that have been -- and become frustrated when it's become clear that our WSCC process is very complicated and slow in both the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Mr. Speaker, firefighters have been waiting ten years for those changes, and now they're told they must wait another two years for the next election in Nunavut to take place. They cannot wait any longer as their occupation becomes increasingly dangerous.

The Northwest Territories has already fallen well behind the rest of Canada in protecting our firefighters from serious illness. When will the Minister choose to work closer with his counterparts and establish a clear timeline for this crucial legislation? These are our first responders that keep our communities safe. They've been waiting for too long for this help. We need to help our firefighters and first responders now and give them the support they need. And I hope the Minister will agree with me when I ask him questions later today. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 533-20(1):
FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD BANKS
CANADA

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the critical work of food banks Canada in addressing food insecurity across our northern communities.

In December 2024, Food Banks Canada held an important presentation and information sessions in Yellowknife. These sessions highlighted the alarming reality that first insecurity in our territories jumped from 26 percent to 36 percent between 2021 and 2022. With the Northwest Territories having the

second highest rate among the territories at 26.4 percent, these information sessions served as a catalyst for bringing much needed food security services to our remote regions of the Northwest Territories.

The December meetings brought together regional community leaders and food security experts to discuss the unique challenges facing our communities and addressing the community food security issues by taking concrete steps to address the current food crisis.

Mr. Speaker, Food Banks Canada are committed to reaching our most remote communities, and this demonstrates their understanding that food security solutions must be tailored to our northern realities. I am glad to announce Food Banks Canada is actively working to plan a tour of the Sahtu regional communities during this spring season. This tour will build on foundations developed from last December and will focus on developing sustainable food systems that respect our unique northern context. As we move forward, I'm encouraged by Food Banks Canada's collaborative approach working with local communities to develop solutions that address our specific needs. Their commitment to understanding, proposing solutions, and advocating for policy change represents a comprehensive approach to tackling food insecurity in the North. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 534-20(1):
HOUSING NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
PARTNERSHIP WITH TLICHO INVESTMENT
CORPORATION

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Housing in Monfwi riding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a long sitting, and we can all use a good news story.

On February 24th, the Minister responsible for Housing NWT announced that ten new housing units will be making their way to communities in Monfwi riding as a result of a partnership with the Tlicho Investment Corporation:

- Behchoko will receive three duplexes;
- Gameti will get one modular single duplex; and,
- Whati will get a stick-built two-storey duplex.

I have said in this House many times that housing is needed in communities I serve, and

it is a relief to see progress. It is anticipated that these units will be occupied by springtime.

I would like to thank the housing Minister for this and also her visit to Behchoko on Friday, February 21st, where she joined community members for lunch and toured the seniors' duplex. Her presence in the community and connecting with community members meant a lot to the people. This is also a great example of partnership between the GNWT and economic developing arms of Indigenous governments, one that I hope other regions can benefit from as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 535-20(1):
SALE OF CANADIAN NORTH AIRLINES

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the promotion.

Mr. Speaker, we've seen the news articles and we've seen the press releases that there's a change in ownership of Canadian North Airlines, no longer being owned by an Indigenous -- to Indigenous organizations, rather, but now a publicly-traded company. Mr. Speaker, we've yet to see what effect that will have on the scheduled service, particularly up the Mackenzie Valley into Inuvik where, of course, I live, and it may, Mr. Speaker, invite competition, it may not, but we do know that currently the airport in Inuvik does not have security screening so if there was an appetite to have direct flights from Inuvik to other major airports in Western Canada, Mr. Speaker, we would need that infrastructure in there.

If I recall when the design for the new Inuvik airport building was completed -- and I know it's still on our capital plan, I believe, for 2027, there was space allocated, if I recall correctly, to have the security screening area put in the building, but I don't think there was a commitment to do it when the building was first built. And I think now, Mr. Speaker, given that there may be other opportunities in the aviation industry in that region, I'm hoping that we'll reconsider that design or certainly look at it again to ensure that we have screening services and security services in there. There's obviously other reasons why we would need that, certainly with -- you know, with the influx of drugs in the territory, certainly having airport security is always an advantage to that with dangerous things coming in and out. We also, as you know, just had our runway expanded so now we can actually accept larger aircraft, potentially international or certainly larger aircraft that can land there. So many reasons as we continue to

move forward since the -- since we decided to put the new terminal building up there to maybe relook at that now and ensure that we do at least at the beginning -- and customs may come down the road, but have security and screening in that airport build when we initially build it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Members' statements. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 536-20(1):
AFTERCARE AND SUPPORT FOR
ADDICTIONS RECOVERY

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I got a little excited when I heard the King was going to be here, because I have issues with him about the treaties.

Mr. Speaker, the Northwest Territories faces addiction crisis that is affecting our young and young adults. These are young Indigenous men and women who are the future. I hear from my younger constituents all the time that they want to stay in the North to improve their communities and revitalize their culture. It is a shame that some of these young adults are impacted by the drug crisis, but they are always trying their best to fight back and become healthy again. And when they return to good health, I know they are ready to build a brighter future for themselves and their family and the community.

Unfortunately, many who have succeeded in battling addictions are still not coming back, and they have no choice. They were thankful for support for health and social services to seek treatment, but when they return to the North they find little aftercare they need at a vulnerable time in their lives. Instead, they are back surrounded by the terrible influences this drug crisis has inflicted on their communities with no end in sight. Then they are forced to choose between their health and the community and so many head back down south to be closer to support they need.

This lack of aftercare is affecting my constituents of all ages. Furthermore, not all of them necessarily need to leave to treatment in British Columbia or Alberta. We need to have a treatment option in the Northwest Territories, especially culturally-appropriate and on the land.

The Minister has done some good work already, but my constituents are asking for more resources. I hope that health and social services can work closely with Indigenous governments to improve treatment and aftercare in the North. I will have questions for

the Minister at the appropriate time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 537-20(1):
SNOWKING'S 30TH ANNUAL WINTER
FESTIVAL CASTLE GRAND OPENING

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's hard to believe, but this is already the last day in February. The sun is coming back on the northern horizon, GNWT procurement officers are gearing up for the final spring to the fiscal year, and the coolest venue in Canada is about to cut its doors open.

As the Member for Yellowknife North already announced, Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 30th Anniversary of the Snowking's Winter Festival. 30 years, Mr. Speaker. That is quite the feat. That's 30 years of true grassroots community building.

This festival exists because of the hard work and dedication of a scrappy group of Yellowknifers who wanted to bring some winter magic to the town's children by building a snow castle. They didn't wait for funding. They didn't wait for a communication and marketing strategy. I reckon they didn't even wait for permits, Mr. Speaker; they just did it.

That's true northern spirit, Mr. Speaker. And since its humble beginning in the 1990s, this boldness and audacity has paid off and the festival has grown into a world-renowned institution and, dare I say, the best winter festival in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, this year's festival will be running for four weeks, and the castle features a drawbridge, a dozen ice gargoyles, and a two-storey King's hall with four private snugs for your comfort and viewing pleasure. The snow castle will be home to art shows, standup comedy, music concerts of all genres from fiddle music to hip hop, dance events, puppetry, film screenings, and even larping. And, of course, a magical snow playground for kids of all ages, including everyone's favorite, the ice slides. The Snowking Winter Festival also hosts the famous International Snow Carving Symposium with some ten teams from seven countries and five Canadian territories and provinces competing under the theme Medieval Lore.

The castle opens tomorrow, and I'm happy to report that, courtesy of your Yellowknife MLAs, admission will be free for everyone tomorrow afternoon from noon until 5 p.m. so, as I do

every year, I encourage everyone to come down. I encourage everyone to come down to the Yellowknife Bay and check out this year's snow castle. As the Snowking likes to say, there's no business like snow business.

Let's congratulate the 25 staff and as many volunteers that are working on this year's Snowking Winter Festival for these 30 years of absolute marvel and wish them all a blizzard of a success for the 30 years to come. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Members' statements. Member from Deh Cho.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 538-20(1):
CELLULAR PHONE COVERAGE ON
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HIGHWAYS

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to speak about the lack of cell service across the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, I've heard from numerous Deh Cho constituents who have voiced their concerns about the lack of cell service when travelling on the NWT highway system. People have safety concerns regarding the inability to call for help if something were to happen while travelling on our highways. Mr. Speaker, some people have told me that this is an issue that affects them so much that they fear driving alone, especially to do business in other communities or to visit family. This issue affects all residents and businesses as well, and it must be improved. The volume of traffic continues to increase, and this is a serious safety issue.

Mr. Speaker, this is an NWT-wide problem that all highways have and all regions are dealing with. All ten highways across the NWT have this problem, and this problem is especially dangerous for people in the event of natural disasters and emergencies when telecommunications can go down.

Mr. Speaker, I know this issue has come up across assemblies in the past, and now that improving public safety is part of this mandate of the 20th Assembly, I believe improving cell service across our highway system should be part of our government's plan. I will have questions for the Minister of Infrastructure later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 539-20(1):
EXTENDED BENEFITS COVERAGE GAPS
REGARDING OPTOMETRY

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Coordination of benefits, many of us know what that means, but for those who don't that means when your work two sets of benefits are working together to get the same ends. We often here this when it comes to dental coverage and prescription coverage and, more particularly, we hear it as in the co-pay system works, 80/20. In other words, one covers 80, then the other one covers the 20.

So as a hypothetical example, Mr. Speaker, with respect to co-benefits -- and I stress hypothetical of course -- let's just say I had to get a prescription to stay as calm and as relaxed as I am as you see here every single day, you know -- you probably think they don't pay enough to keep me calm and relaxed. That said, Mr. Speaker, my submitted prescription -- and, again, this is hypothetical -- my first payer pays 80 percent and my wife's coverage picks up the remainder. But now this is what we're really talking about, the challenges of co-pay benefits.

Now this is a real scenario, not a hypothetical one. Imagine now you're sitting at the ripe age of being a senior. That's in some cases 55 or older, and you need to tap into your benefits for spectacles. And if you're a young person, spectacles mean glasses; you know, the old way of describing them. Mr. Speaker, your spectacles have a theoretic cap on extended health benefits of \$300. Now, I'm not against the government saying, through our Blue Cross, going, do you have private insurance. Nothing wrong with that. Hey, let's spend someone else's money, no problem. So that said, the private insurance, if they paid \$300, the extended health benefits will say well, we're not paying any more. That seems almost prejudice or bias by not allowing seniors to tap into their benefit.

So imagine, Mr. Speaker, if you have \$500 prescription glasses -- and I should stress, in the old days we used to call them Hubbell telescope lenses where they were really thick. But nowadays, they have fantastic technology. If you have a very heavy prescription, they can grind those lenses and make them thin so you look -- they look as normal as possible, Mr. Speaker, which is very important for people's confidence and their ability to do what they need to do.

But those glasses, the extended health benefits says well, if your private insurance is already paid 300 bucks, we're not paying the gap, the difference. Seniors are being denied outright their benefit that they deserve and, as Northerners, they've earned. Mr. Speaker, I'll have questions for the Minister of health to fix this gap because we cover co-pay on dental

and prescription. We should do it here too. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Members' statements.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 540-20(1):
GILBERT AND MARY JANE CAZON 2024
OPERATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Colleagues, on Tuesday, November 5TH to Thursday, November 7th, NWT Tourism held their annual 2024 AGM, conference, industry awards recipients and fundraising auction in Yellowknife. They had over 160 attend the AGM, conference, awards ceremony, and auction. I am proud to say one of the awards winners is from Fort Simpson.

The company is -- and I apologize, if I say this wrong. Mary Jane, you can get mad at me later -- K'iyeli Tourism Services. The owners are Gilbert and Mary Jane Cazon. Some of you recognize that name - Mary Jane Cazon's, and you would be correct. She is one of our translators here in the Assembly.

She and her husband received the Operator of the Year Award from the deputy minister of ITI, on Thursday evening. Colleagues, I have read her speech and I can tell you she did an amazing job, which I cannot properly summarize, so the next best thing is to add it to the end of my statement and have it deemed as read and printed in the Hansard.

I have had the opportunity to know both these individuals for a long time. I have witnessed their commitment to share their cultural and sharing the rich traditions of the Dene people whether it was at the school, community celebrations, special events, or one-on-one conversations. It is always about pride in the Dene way of life and sharing this knowledge. Every year, the company delivers two cultural camps for elementary and high school students in Fort Simpson and provides day long and overnight options for each grade and class. I am happy to tell you the company has taken program opportunities to help assist their tourism operation and staff development with ITI and mentorship of the youth. They have spent the last two years mentoring the same individual, so he has invaluable skills to support cultural tourism within the Deh Cho region. It has been about passing on their knowledge and the region's amazing history to others.

They were awarded and accredited by the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada for its mark of excellence. Upon receiving this

award, businesses that have been operating for years in the Deh Cho region have now added their services to be part of their seasonal booking packages. I would like to thank them both for the excellent work they are doing in the region and congratulate them on all their success and wish more in the future.

Today, it is my great honour to present the award for outstanding Indigenous tourism to a truly exceptional organization: K'iyeli Tourism Services. This unique venture, owned and operated by Gilbert and Mary Jane Cazon, is based in Fort Simpson in the Deh Cho region of the Northwest Territories. It's more than a tourism operation; it's a beacon of cultural pride and dedication, deeply committed to sharing the rich traditions of the Dene people with visitors from around the world.

This summer, I, along with several colleagues, had the privilege of attending a "feeding the fire" ceremony led by Gilbert and Mary Jane Cazon in Fort Simpson. It was a profoundly moving experience a chance to witness the reverence with which they honour the land, their ancestors, and the spirits. Standing by the fire, I felt a deep connection to the Dene way of life and the values that guide it. Gilbert and Mary Jane's warmth and guidance made it a truly unforgettable moment, one that left myself and my colleagues feeling both humbled and inspired by the depth of their cultural traditions.

Gilbert and Mary Jane have poured their hearts into K'iyeli, investing not only in their business but also in the people who work alongside them. Through programs offered by Industry, Tourism and Investment, they've taken the time to mentor young Indigenous talent, passing on skills that foster careers in cultural tourism. For two years now, they have been working closely with a young mentee, imparting the knowledge and skills that will help sustain cultural tourism in the Deh Cho region for generations to come. It's a testament to their belief in the power of mentorship and the impact of hands-on learning.

K'iyeli's dedication to excellence has earned them accreditation and the prestigious Mark of Excellence from the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada. Since receiving this recognition, K'iyeli has seen an influx of new business, partnering with well-established companies like Black Feather and even national Geographic. Their contributions to Dene Culture Awareness and unique cultural offerings have set a new standard in Indigenous tourism, showing that they are not just delivering services they are sharing life-changing experiences.

K'iyeli's tours and cultural workshops take guests on a profound journey. Whether it's paddling along the mighty Mackenzie River, learning the craft of beading moccasins, or engaging in moose-calling and rabbit-snaring, Gilbert and Mary Jane have created an immersive experience that offers guests a rare window into the Dene way of life. It's no wonder that their business has grown and that they're booked season after season.

But perhaps one of the most inspiring aspects of K'iyeli's work is their unwavering commitment to community leadership. They are well-known figures in Fort Simpson, regularly visiting schools to teach traditional practices and foster pride in the Dene culture among youth. Their programs address community needs, focusing on vital issues like mental health and addictions, and through these efforts, they strengthen both the cultural heritage and social fabric of the community.

Gilbert and Mary Jane's leadership at K'iyeli demonstrates how powerful cultural tourism can be not only as an economic driver but also as a force for cultural preservation and community resilience. K'iyeli is a remarkable example of how a business can elevate and protect a culture, and their dedication is an inspiration to us all.

Please join me in congratulating K'iyeli Tourism Services, and Gilbert and Mary Jane Cazon, on this well-deserved award. Thank you for the work you do, for the stories you share, and for the legacy you are creating for future generations. Congratulations!
Thank you.

Members' statements. Member from Great Slave.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 541-20(1):
RECOGNITION OF NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES VOLUNTEERS

MS. REID: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that; I thought you forgot about me. Mr. Speaker, I wish to echo the sentiments made by the Minister for MACA yesterday and expand on them just slightly.

Mr. Speaker, our territory runs on the sweat equity of volunteers. Many of those volunteers are well-known figures in our community, and some were recognized formally yesterday. I applaud all nominees and recipients of the Outstanding Volunteer Awards this year and each year.

Mr. Speaker, we should always applaud exceptional individuals, but I also want to take a moment to applaud everyone who sits behind

a raffle ticket table or bags groceries for a kids' sport fundraiser. I want to applaud all the volunteers at the upcoming Snowking Festival which is free to all tomorrow, as mentioned by my colleagues, this Saturday. I want to applaud all ushers at the Northern Arts and Cultural Centre and the Subarctic Safety Squad, or SAS, at Folk on the Rocks who ensure everyone has a safe weekend of music and cultural fun. There are endless examples, of course, but those are just some that spring to mind.

Mr. Speaker, as someone who has worked in and out of the non-profit sector for 20 years as a staff member and a volunteer board member, I'm passionate about what our fellow residents do heart forward and with no personal gain, except for the feeling of being in community which is priceless. Mr. Speaker, any and all efforts to commit yourself to helping your community is welcomed and appreciated. Everyone has different strengths and abilities, and no amount of effort is too small. So thank you to all the residents who volunteer. The social fabric of our territory is richer for it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Members' statements. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Colleagues, I'd like to recognize two pages from the Nahendeh riding, Jackson Martineau and a special one, Serena Gargan who is the granddaughter - granddaughter - of our translator Mary Jane Cazon. So I think this is a first. We've had a father and son in the Assembly. Now we have a granddaughter and a grandmother helping provide services to our MLAs. So thank you very much for your commitment to us here today. Thank you. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Oh, Member for Yellowknife North.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: [Translation] And Zachary Messier who are from Allain St-Cyr School in Yellowknife, and they're both residents of Yellowknife South. [Translation Ends].

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

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to recognize the services of our page and our translation ladies in the back

and Jonas Lafferty as well. Enjoy the weekend. Mahsi, and thanks for your services.

MR. SPEAKER: Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Mr. Speaker, masi. [Translation] Mr. Speaker, thank you. It's at the end of the month, and today is last day of the Indigenous language month, so I'd like to recognize all the interpreters in the house. When we interpret, it's a difficult job, we know that, and I just want to say thank you to them. As Dene people, we love our languages, and it relates to who we are. A good example of this morning is all the children in the gallery, when we say in our language, we don't say Weledeh, we say Wee Lee Deh. So I just want to correct that, and that's where they're coming from is the Weledeh School. I'd like to thank them as all. Thank you. [Translation Ends].

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

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to recognize Mary Jane Cazon and Sarah Gargan who do the Dene Zhatie translation. The work that they do is very important and needs to continue in assemblies such as this. Thank you. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Deh Cho. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 562-20(1): INUVIK AIRPORT SECURITY SCREENING AREA CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following up on my Member's statement, can the Minister of Infrastructure confirm that there is, indeed, a security and screening piece of infrastructure included with the new airport terminal build -- thank you -- in Inuvik.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was listening intently to the Member's statement. At this point in time I can certainly confirm that there is a design that is meant to balance both the current needs and future opportunities but as to what that might specifically mean, Mr. Speaker, I might need a little more time, and I'd be happy to get that information for the Member. Thank you.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you. So I guess my second question will be then, so based on the Minister's answer would she commit to certainly having a -- reviewing that design to ensure that that important piece is included in there? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I certainly am happy to confirm and to commit that we will take a look at the design. Certainly, this project began pre-COVID, and the world has changed significantly since then and continues to change. So if this presents us an opportunity now today to ensure that we are truly looking at the opportunities tomorrow, then I'm happy to take that opportunity. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 563-20(1):
WORKERS' SAFETY AND COMPENSATION
COMMISSION POLICIES AND COVERAGE
FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I said in my Member's statement, presumptive coverage for firefighters and first responders for PTSD and ten forms of cancer and event specific coverage, such as catastrophic disasters like the Fort McMurray wildfire or the wildfires we experienced here, are not currently covered by WSCC legislation. This means firefighters have to go through a lengthy approval process and, in some cases, they're dealing with terminal cancers and had to spend all this time fighting with insurance rather than enjoying the time they have left. Mr. Speaker, is the Minister -- can the Minister provide a reason why this work hasn't been done? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Minister responsible for WSCC.

HON. VINCE MCKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not that the work hasn't been done. It's ongoing. And, you know, I've been a firefighter for 30 years. I know it doesn't look like it, but I will say that this is something that's near and dear to my heart, and I think it's something that I've echoed that we need to keep working on and actually continue working on. This is something that's been also -- from the previous Minister responsible for WSCC has been addressed. So part of the complication is with two territories sharing an organization, we have to work together with the legislation, and I know they're hardworking on this to get this pushed through. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one other thing that needs to happen that's not covered by legislation is the latency periods for testicular, colorectal, and esophageal cancer. These latency periods need to be shorter. They're currently not to the national standard. Is the Minister also looking at working with his counterparts -- or sorry, is the WSCC working on shortening these latency periods as well? Thank you.

HON. VINCE MCKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know every province and territory is different on their coverage for different types of cancers, and I know that some of the cancers that he's raised, I know, like, some of them are, like, 20 years in the service, that kind of thing. So I'm unaware if the work is being done on changing the timelines on them. But this is something we can look into and see if it's reflecting on what's the -- you know, the kind of standard or what's going on across the jurisdictional scan across Canada. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of WSCC. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I provided a lot of information to the Minister so he could start there. He's welcome to do his own research. Mr. Speaker, we do have a peculiar set up with the WSCC unlike other jurisdictions. Could the Minister work to secure an agreement that we can move forward with this and start drafting our own legislation? We could pass the updates now, get it out of the way, and then Nunavut can catch up. But I think it's high time we did this. Every day we wait is a day that firefighters have to take more time to get coverage. It's not just firefighters; it's sheriffs, it's police officers, it's frontline responders. And we deserve to give them the best care that they're -- that we could possibly give them. So can we get this process started here in the Northwest Territories and then get Nunavut to catch up? I'm sure there's something possible. Thank you.

HON. VINCE MCKAY: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, and I hear the Member, and I do agree this is something that we need to work on. We'll continue to work, and we're in a unique situation where we share with Nunavut the responsibilities, and we'll continue to work with them and see how we can push this or get this through.

However, you know, workers are covered, and that's what emergency services are. They are workers. So there are some cases where they are covered under the Workers' Compensation Act. In fact, in the Act on page 28 shows a list

of items that can be covered under workers. So there is some coverage, and I do hear the Member and we'll continue to work to try to escalate this. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for WSCC. Oral questions. Member from Deh Cho.

QUESTION 564-20(1):
CELLULAR COVERAGE ON NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES HIGHWAYS

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure on the cell service. When will the connections between the communities begin? Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a situation that we are somewhat dependent or really quite dependent on right now on NorthwesTel. They are our provider of cell services. What we have done in this space is certainly encourage them directly as a stakeholder here in the North but also encourage CRTC to ensure that their funding pots and funding pools are available to provide supports for exactly this service. And, Mr. Speaker, one of the biggest reasons -- or one of the biggest barriers isn't necessarily just the cell towers themselves. It's the lack of energy to actually power those cell towers. So, Mr. Speaker, we've raised these issues both, as I said, with NorthwesTel and CRTC and certainly are hoping that we will continue to see positive responses from them in this space as we have on some other issues that we've raised. Thank you.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, are there any communication safety alternatives that can be put in place between Fort Providence and Yellowknife and the other communities? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that actually is an opportunity to raise something that has been changing in the last couple of years where some of the vehicles that are used by the GNWT staff and fleet are installing satellite-based technology in those vehicles. This is not a perfect solution but certainly if folks are finding themselves in need on the highways, our staff now are better placed to actually provide cell coverage. And, Mr. Speaker, there's other opportunities that we may be able to use, again, to set up towers that would be localized at key points. Again, so just

to provide at least some emergency services. So happy to speak to the Member more and perhaps there may be specific areas along the way that we could work towards having some emergency locations of that sort. Thank you.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you. Is there a record of traffic incidents on these isolated stretches of highway that lack cell service? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there is, indeed, and I certainly can get those numbers for the Member. I don't have all different stretches of highway. But I would certainly be able to provide that to this House.

And, Mr. Speaker, I just want to make one more note. There are -- there is a movement in some phone abilities now for people's cell phones to actually connect directly to satellite. I want to say that here because, again, this is an issue that affects residents, and I appreciate the opportunity to bring attention to the fact that people should look at their own new -- the newer cell phones because they may actually have the ability to connect via satellite without a cell tower. So that technology is changing very rapidly and, again, we want to support residents to use what's available for their safety. Thank you.

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

Point of Order

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to raise a point of order. A few minutes ago in the House, when yourself mixed up the Member for Yellowknife South with the Member for Yellowknife North, myself, there was a comment from the Member for Yellowknife Centre stating that, well, it's just the same thing from our perspective, implying that I am somehow the same person as the Member for Yellowknife South, which is clearly not the case, but I think what was meant by this implication is that somehow we are inappropriately aligned. And, obviously, I think people know that I am an independent Member. I have my own positions, I speak for myself, I make my own decisions based on what is best for my constituents, and it feels inappropriate for the Member to imply that I'm somehow the same or just following the lead or, you know, following the will of a Member of Cabinet. So I wish to raise that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Just a brief second here.

Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. I am going to take it under advisement, and I'll make my decision by Monday. Thank you.

Oral questions. Member from Great Slave.

QUESTION 565-20(1):
LOWEST RETURN AIRFARE FOR INCOME
TAX RETURNS

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's tax time. We're at the end of February. So I am going to bring up a perennial issue but not with the Minister of Finance, with the Minister of Infrastructure. Some folks might know Canadian North is no longer supplying the lowest return airfare. You have to go to CRA. And I have constituents asking me, and I will ask the Minister, what sort of engagement has the GNWT, Department of Infrastructure, done with the airlines to make sure that the CRA is considering our northern context? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we certainly have in the past, through Department of Finance, tried to work with CRA to encourage them to have a more flexible approach to determining what the lowest return airfare is. They do now have a tool that they put out. As far as them requiring or requesting the private actors to do that, Mr. Speaker, I can't say that I've certainly myself had any direct requests to them to do that. This issue did come up just recently from the MLA, and I haven't necessarily been able to sort of determine who to ask. In fact, there's been some change obviously of late in terms of who the owners of these organizations are. Happy to take it away, Mr. Speaker, and see if they would be open to some cajoling on that side but, Mr. Speaker, right now it's they're private companies, and it would be up to them whether they want to undertake something different than what they have now. My point of contact, really, would be with CRA to try to continue to get them to improve their processes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. REID: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for that, and I'm sorry if I misstated my intent. It's not that I am wanting the Minister to cajole private industry but rather to cajole CRA, as always, as her counterpart in the federal government. I will have questions for the Minister of Finance next. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Okay, colleagues, remember, this is oral questions, not opportunity for Member's statements. Thank you.

Oral questions. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

QUESTION 566-20(1):
COMMUNITY-LEVEL ADDICTIONS
AFTERCARE OPTIONS AND SUPPORTS

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, no matter how small the community is, it needs to have aftercare options so people can live there after treatment. How do we get more aftercare programs into the communities of Dettah, N'dilo, Lutselk'e, and Fort Resolution? Thank you.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the Member's advocacy on this area. This is a hard discussion. Like, we always are having this discussion because we see it so much. We have it in our families. Addiction recovery is a personal journey, and there's no one size fits all so, yes, we have to provide different ways for people to be able to provide that journey.

Aftercare, you know, we provide a different variety of ways for people to help them to get sober or to deal with their addictions, whatever their addictions may be. But one of the things, and especially I'd like to highlight, is the community wellness and addiction recovery fund. You know, the Member comes from Indigenous communities, and this fund is designed for Indigenous communities to build their own program. It can be used for that aftercare support. There is money available every year for this, and they can design it on how it best fits their needs. We have staff that will support them in creating the proposal for the money. We've tried to make it as seamless as possible. So I would like to highlight that with this Member and, you know, and continue to work with them and his leaders and his communities to access this fund. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if I got any more questions; she answered them all.

But anyway, Mr. Speaker, health can include services from other departments that promote healthy living such as recreation. What about the idea of the health and social services putting coordinators in small communities that can help coordinate all the options for my constituents from multiple departments, especially for the young people? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again, I'm going to highlight -- and I'm going to continue to highlight the community wellness and addiction recovery fund as well as the suicide prevention fund that each community regional government can apply on up to \$72,000 a year. I think the regional wellness and addiction recovery is up to \$300,000 plus a year. Those dollars could be used to -- if it's part of their wellness in their community to enhance -- to hire somebody to work with youth, to do recreational programming, that is -- that's the flexibility of these two pots of funding, is to be able to use that money to create the program that will work in their community. So, again, I look forward to working with the Member and being able to -- for his community to access this funding for the betterment of his community residents. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you for that information. That's really helpful. How is the health and social services department coming along to establish a treatment centre here in the Northwest Territories? If that can happen soon enough, will the department work with the Indigenous governments to help make this happen, that would be awesome. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to -- you know, I want to highlight, you know, within the Inuvialuit region they have the Inuvialuit on-the-land camp that they have structured. We've heard and we've seen in the news the Gwich'in camp that they've created. Those are funding that they work bilaterally, a lot of that with the federal government, with some money over the years from GNWT. The Tlicho has recently gone to the federal government for their polysubstance use funding from the feds. There's many pots of funding out there so that Indigenous communities can build. We have heard loud and clear from Indigenous governments that they want to be able to run treatment facilities in the way that they want it close to the land base and provided by Indigenous in Indigenous values. The GNWT is not the place to do that. And so I encourage Indigenous governments to continue to reach out to our department for the community wellness and recovery addiction fund. If there's ways that they can work with our department to highlight other pots of federal funding, I look forward to having those discussions with other Indigenous leaders to access those dollars because I think across our territory, every Indigenous group wants to be able to provide

that service in their own way, and we want to support them in that work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 567-20(1):
YELLOWKNIFE EMERGENCY SHELTER
FOR HOMELESS

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have questions today for the Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs.

So in meeting with Yellowknife shelter operators and local business owners and business advocates, a need was identified for a published list or a resource listing all the different shelter options available in Yellowknife, but specifically identifying hours of operation and where someone can go if they're intoxicated or not intoxicated, man, woman, you know, different age groups, so that if someone encounters someone who is struggling on the street or that's coming into a local business, they have an easy resource showing where that person might be able to go, you know, someone who fits into their situation and what is actually available to them. Can the Minister explain whether such a resource is already available? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have that level of detail on hand. I apologize to the Member. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Minister happen to know whether any gaps have been identified in terms of there are certain times of the day or night when someone who, you know, man or woman, who may be sober or intoxicated might not have anywhere to go; has that challenge been examined or identified by the department? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned yesterday in the House, the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs is working with NGO partners in Yellowknife. There's a meeting coming up in early March, another one in early April, and so that's the forum often where those types of discussions would happen, and those types of gaps would be identified. There's been a number of conversations over the past many months since last summer between the government and NGOs, and so I'm confident that the department is aware of those gaps. I

don't have a list on hand, and I can't point to an itemized list for the Member but given the relationship that has been developing with the NGOs I'm confident that there is an awareness of that. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that there's people often working in silos, each doing their own separate effort, would the Minister commit to producing such a sort of easy to use resource not just to be able to give out to shelter operators, but to distribute amongst Yellowknife businesses who are really asking for this resource? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a -- I'm happy to look into this and see what we can do. It makes sense to have that information available. You know, even for MLAs, we often get inquiries from constituents and we need that type of information at hand, whether you're a Yellowknife MLA or you know some folks who wound up here and might need that information. So I will look into it and get back to the Member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Oral questions. Member from Great Slave.

QUESTION 568-20(1):
LOWEST RETURN AIRFARE FOR INCOME
TAX RETURNS

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for the admonishment; I will not grandstand in my questions anymore.

Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Finance. As she knows, and from my previous line of questions, there have been changes to the CRA posting publicly the information around the lowest return airfare. Can she confirm as to whether or not her department is sharing that information widely with residents to make them aware of this change and to be able to access that information? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's always a bit of hesitancy to be seen to be giving or suggesting how people should go about their taxes, but I take that point and I certainly commit to go back to the department and make sure that we are sharing what we can about where to access more information, what to do if people are uncertain about where to go with

questions around CRA and to use their calculating -- calculators. So, again, I'll go back and make sure that our comms folks are active in this space and we're doing what we can to help educate residents. Thank you.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that. I think that would go a long way for folks to understand the new lay of the land.

There is an outstanding issue that I am not aware of the answer to yet, but it was raised in this House in the 19th Assembly, which is northern residents tax deduction which is a related by separate issue. Can the Minister tell me if indexing of that residency amount has been raised since 2023? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that it has, Mr. Speaker, but, again, this is where I do want to be cautious. I'll want to just confirm that I've got the right numbers and the right dates and will certainly by Monday have something on the table to the House just to confirm. It is an area where we do want residents to have accurate information and information that is, you know, certainly not seen as being advice from me or necessarily from the department. They should be seeking that from tax professionals. So to the extent that I can confirm that or provide access to those resources, I will have that tabled for Monday. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 569-20(1):
EXTENDED HEALTHCARE BENEFITS FOR
SENIORS' PRESCRIPTION GLASSES

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a great privilege to have a question to the health Minister today, and we're going to talk about spectacles, Mr. Speaker. Maybe I'll put them on later.

Mr. Speaker, seniors who go and try to get their coverage are denied through Blue Cross if they have private insurance. Mr. Speaker, this issue's been brought to the department, but the department has said, sorry, we're not interested in talking to you because you provide health care. But, really, they're trying to ensure seniors get their benefit.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell me what she can do to help deal or wade -- help us wade through this quagmire of coverage. Thank you.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And as I talk, my spectacles get fogged up because of the mask, so. So just with extended health benefits, if somebody else has other coverage they may be qualified, you know, through work or some other benefit. The extended health benefit is the payer of last resort. That is the policy. Therefore, residents have to claim through their first -- the first plan, and then if it's not all covered, then Alberta Blue Cross will pick up the difference up to the eligible amount. And if this is not happening, then we need to discuss this with Alberta Blue Cross because the policy isn't being administered properly. And so I thank Minister, if this is not what's happening, to inform us of this discrepancy. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's the best answer I've heard out of Cabinet this whole session, Mr. Speaker. And I want to acknowledge that.

Mr. Speaker, the only other question, assuming it goes well, is that can I have the Minister agree that she'll investigate this and report this back to me or the House by -- well, say, can we get an update or some sort before the May session? Because I suspect the next two weeks is too soon. But if she can commit to do a public clarification as to what isn't being done but what will be done and etcetera, she understands. Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, and I would also like the Member if he wishes to bring the certain instance directly to my attention at my office so we can deal with that resident immediately. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Tabling of documents. Minister responsible for WSCC.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 298-20(1):
PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY FOR BILL 21:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE WORKER'S
COMPENSATION ACT

TABLED DOCUMENT 299-20(1):
STATEMENT OF CONSISTENCY FOR BILL
21: AN ACT TO AMEND THE WORKER'S
COMPENSATION ACT

HON. VINCE MCKAY: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following two documents: Plain Language Summary for Bill 21, An Act to Amend the Workers' Compensation Act; and, Statement of Consistency for Bill 21, An Act to Amend the Workers' Compensation Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for WSCC. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Motions. Notices of motion for first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. Minister responsible for WSCC.

Second Reading of Bills

BILL 21:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE WORKERS'
COMPENSATION ACT,
CARRIED

HON. VINCE MCKAY: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member from Hay River North, that Bill 21, An Act to Amend the Workers' Compensation Act, be read for the second time. The bill will amend the Workers' Compensation Act to improve and update the way long-term benefits are calculated for permanently injured workers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is in order. To the principle of the bill.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? The motion is carried. Bill 12 has been read a second time and is referred to the standing committee of the Assembly for further consideration.

---Carried

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Second reading of bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters. Bill 11, Tabled Document 275-20(1), with the Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): I now call the Committee of the Whole to order. We'll go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the committee wishes to consider Bill 11, An Act to Amend the Motor Vehicles Act, as well as Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates, Executive and Indigenous Affairs. 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.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): I'll get your attention, please. Before I move on to the bills and other matters, we have in front of us, I just want to take the time to recognize some guests in our gallery here today. I just want to recognize Mary and Gerry Darter, Christine and Eric Gornitsky. They come from California, United States of America. Welcome.

The next one I have is -- I hope I say this right. Tsuyoshi Nagao, and he is from Japan. I want to say welcome to the House. Mahsi.

Thank you, and we're going to continue on. Committee, we have agreed to consider Bill 11, An Act to Amend the Motor Vehicles Act. I will ask the Minister of Infrastructure to introduce the bill. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I am here to present Bill 11, An Act to Amend the Motor Vehicles Act.

Bill 11 is a package of amendments to the Motor Vehicles Act, which include changing how information held by the registrar of motor vehicles can be shared.

First, Bill 11 will protect consumers by allowing anyone shopping for a used vehicle to independently verify its registration history.

Second, the bill will support the NWT Bureau of Statistics to conduct its population count by allowing the registrar to share information from driver's licenses with government agencies.

Third, the bill will prevent fraud by authorizing the registrar to use facial recognition technology to verify that anyone applying for a driver's license or general ID card does not already hold one.

Finally, the bill will reduce red tape by making minor changes to the application processes for persons applying for copies of their own data from the registrar.

The Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment conducted a clause-by-clause review of Bill 11 on February 13. And At that meeting, the standing committee adopted three motions to clarify wording in the bill, at the recommendation of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I have agreed to all three motions.

That concludes my opening remarks, and I would be happy to answer any questions Members may have. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I will ask the Minister of Infrastructure to go to the witness table and, also, I'd like to get the Sergeant-at-Arms to please escort the witnesses into the chamber.

Thank you. Would the Minister please introduce your witnesses, please.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On my left, Jeffrey Nichols, senior legislative advisor at the Department of Infrastructure. And on my right, Sue McKinney as the legislative counsel from the Department of Justice. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): I will now turn to the chair of the standing committee. I will go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I begin my remarks, I want to thank you for introducing our guests in the gallery. I happened to meet them earlier during the break. Of course, you mentioned they're from -- some of them are from the great state of California, which is quite a trek to come here, and, of course, the gentleman from the island of Japan. I should say island nation of Japan. So thank you again for acknowledging all our guests on the record.

So, Mr. Chairman, thank you. Bill 11, An Act to Amend the Motor Vehicles Act, received second reading in the Legislative Assembly on October 30th, 2024, and was referred to the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment for review.

On February 13th, 2025, the standing committee held a public hearing with the Minister of Infrastructure and completed its clause-by-clause review of the bill. I thank the committee for their efforts in reviewing this legislation. On behalf of the committee, I also wish to thank the Minister for assisting us with our review. And as always, individual committee members may have additional comments on their own. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your assistance. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I will now open the floor to general comments on the bill, Bill 11. Any Members that have questions? Does the committee agree that there are no further general comments; can we proceed to clause-by-clause review of the bill? Committee, agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Committee, we will defer the number and title until after consideration of the clauses. Please turn to page 1 of the bill. Clause 1, does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Clause 2, does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Clause 3, does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Clause 4, does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Clause 5, does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Clause 6, does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Clause 7, does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Clause 8, does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Clause 9, does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Bill 11, An Act to Amend the Motor Vehicles Act, does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. The bill as a whole does not -- sorry, the bill as a whole, does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Does committee agree that Bill 11, An Act to Amend the Motor Vehicles Act -- I want to go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was remiss in my earlier statements. I wanted to point out something that committee had engaged the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and that wasn't put on the record here. He had provided some excellent and thoughtful advice to committee and, of course, we shared that with the department, and the department received it in the manner it was delivered which was collaborative in order to find better ways to follow through, and hence, some of the amendments were driven by that conversation and collaboration. So, you know, often I do jest about us not working together. This certainly definitely was an excellent example of working together, including accessing the great advice provided by our Information and Privacy Commissioner, and to that I wish to thank him for his advice and acknowledge the department was able to help us, and we sailed through with those suggestions and amendments. And, hence, we have what we have here today. So I just thought we're going so fast and it was missed, Mr. Fox needs the credit due as our Information and Privacy Commissioner for the work he does, and sometimes that work is quiet and doesn't get acknowledged. Today is not going to be one of the cases. We are going to put on the record we appreciate it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Does the committee agree that Bill 11, An Act to Amend the Motor Vehicles Act, is now ready for third reading? Committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Does the committee agree that this concludes our consideration of Bill 11, An Act to Amend the Motor Vehicles Act? Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you, Minister. Thank you to the witnesses. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses from the chamber. Thank you.

Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 275-20(1), Main Estimates 2025-2026. We will now consider the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs. Does the Minister of the Executive and Indigenous Affairs wish to bring witnesses into the House?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses into the chamber. Would the Minister please introduce his witnesses.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. To my right, we have Tram Do, the director of corporate services. And to my left, John MacDonald, secretary to Cabinet and deputy minister of the department of EIA. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Committee has agreed to forego general comments. Does the committee agree to proceed to the detail contained in the tabled document? Committee, agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Committee, we will defer the departmental summary and review the estimates by activity summary beginning with Cabinet support starting at page 123 with information items on page 125. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Frame Lake, please.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I assume this is probably the best place to be asking questions about the business plan. I just note that there's some business plan update and wanted to ask the department for -- ask the department some questions about that's.

The first one is on the negotiation mandate updates being done by 2025-2026. I've kind of -- I've said to the Minister a few times, you know, this seems like a bit of an underwhelming goal and, you know, I know there's a lot of pressure from everybody who talks about settling the land claims, getting them done, why can't we get them done quicker.

So the first question on this is, you know, why couldn't these negotiation mandate updates simply be done in a few months? Is it that it's really much more complex than it sounds? And secondly, Mr. Chair, what progress have we made thus far on the updates to these mandates? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So one of the issues is that I want to have a chance to actually meet with the Indigenous governments, talk about negotiations, learn from them what their issues and concerns are,

familiarize myself with our mandates and our positions on the concerns from Indigenous governments or our positions on their positions. And, you know, we've been through a full year now. We've had a number of those meetings. And we are actively working on looking at ways to adjust our mandates, if necessary, to ensure that we can make some progress. And so I'm confident that in the first half of this year, we're going to see some significant movement on those mandates. Thank you.

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

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I mean, understanding that negotiations are confidential and the Minister probably won't be able to share too much detail, I mean, if there's anything the department can share with Members or even share publicly about progress that's being made, I would certainly appreciate hearing it; I think a lot of people would. I know this is a high priority item for me and other Members. Yeah, if the Minister wants to elaborate a bit, I would appreciate it. Thanks.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So we have a number of different tables. I mean, I don't know if the Member wants me to get into each one and talk about where things are at but there's been progress on, you know, moving towards AIPs, moving towards finalized agreements. We do send -- and just so the public is aware, we do send the Members quarterly updates that really detail where things are at with those tables, and I'm happy to provide some in-camera briefings as well if committee would wish on these. But, you know, here at the table, it's really hard to sort of in broad terms talk about where we are with all of our tables. So I'll leave it at that for now. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. MORSE: Fair enough, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it. And, yeah, I certainly personally appreciate the offer of a briefing on this and actually think it would be a good idea. It's been -- I don't know if we've had a briefing on the specific subject at AOC, but it's something I'd definitely be open for. So let's perhaps have the AOC chair chat with the Minister about doing that. I'll leave that as my questions for now. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This place is as good as any to find out, I guess maybe first, what are we officially calling -- in the most responsible sense I'm asking this question, what are we officially calling our super deputy minister, principle secretary -- I'm not even sure what we call them -- that has been migrated half-time to Ottawa? So let's start with the actual title name. I'm curious. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. As shared with Members and reported widely in the press, the title is senior envoy to the Government of Canada. Thank you.

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

MR. HAWKINS: So will this senior envoy be still the current or future principle secretary as well? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: The position of principle secretary is currently vacant, and as we move forward with this new arrangement, we will see how things go and what the future holds. I can't say one way or another what the future of the principle secretary position is. Thank you.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I'm curious on how many senior management assistants or deputy assistants of some sort that the Premier's offered to the cabal of staff that support the network of the executive he's added since he's become Premier. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Could the Minister clarify that again; I couldn't quite understand the question. Thanks.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Fair enough. I'll be polite about it. I'll say how many senior level staff has he added to his office through the EIA process that are new? So I can think of at least one. This is

at least two. If we have a senior envoy person that never existed before, I'm curious on how many additional people he's added to this department. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So the senior envoy is not a new person. It's the same person who is in a different role. We have an associate deputy minister with Housing NWT and an society deputy minister with the health care system sustainability unit. And those are the senior positions that have been recently added. Although I'll note that the associate deputy minister position already existed in Housing NWT. Thank you.

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

MR. HAWKINS: So if we consider this just shuffling of positions, the senior envoy would not be a new position but if he staffs it, when would we define it as a new position? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So there was the principle secretary moved into a new role, so the role is new. I'm not sure if there's a technical definition I can provide about when a position is new, but the position did not exist before it was created so in that sense it's a new position, but it's not a new person in the position. Thank you.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, yeah, I mean, we can play semantics around names. But I mean, if he wants to give it another name, it's still a different pay -- it's still the same pay, same whatever. So I'm going to allow him to call it whatever he wants; I don't care. But if he backfills the principle secretary, then it's a new body and a new pay line. That's the issue I'm really drawing at to clarify.

So my understanding is there's more staff being added to that office to support the Premier and the executive. So how many new, outside of what was previously there at the start of this government, have been added to this office? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: There's as many people in the executive hallway now as there were when we started. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: I am trying to avoid to name names out of respect for the individuals. It's not the individuals at issue. I'm really getting at the fact that we've had quite a bit of spending at the executive level, especially when we talk about fiscal responsibility, realigning and whatnot, and I'm just curious on how much more this section will grow, and I'm not sure that there's any benefit or value.

So with respect to the senior envoy, how often will this individual be in Ottawa in comparison to their current position being in Yellowknife? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So that's still to be determined. We -- you know, we're in the middle of a leadership race right now. It is prior to, you know, potentially an election period. The House is not sitting. And so there's different times in Ottawa. Sometimes there's a lot of people around. Sometimes there's not a lot of people around. Sometimes there's transitions when you want to have a voice there. Sometimes there's not. So it's dependent, and it's hard to really say with the current situation in Ottawa what that split of time will be. Thank you.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you. So this is a two-part question. The first part is what evidence-based decision-making was designed to show that this position of an envoy is justified; and, what type of political credentials does this person bring to the table through evidence that shows that they are the right person for this envoy position?

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So we've been working, you know, now for a year trying to work with Ottawa and, you know, experiencing success in some areas, less success in other areas, and it was clear that there was a need for, you know, a different approach or augmenting the current approach, so not even going to say necessarily different. I don't want to get into an individual public

servant's resume on the floor of the House, but the individual in the position has significant experience working in Government of Canada, in various departments at various levels in the Government of the Northwest Territories, with Indigenous governments directly, and I mean those are the kind of qualifications I would expect for someone in that role. Thank you.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you. Well, as we all know, a principle secretary doesn't have to bring any credentials to the job other than being the political whisperer of the Premier where they do what they do, and I don't have a problem with that specifically. But, you know, if we're sending them fully armed financially with special titles, maybe even red carpet and cherubs -- I'm not sure what it'll end up looking like -- I'm curious -- you know, I'm curious about what they will bring to their table and their ability. That said, can the Premier, or I guess in this case Minister, highlight how many other provinces or territories who have a envoy -- special envoy in Ottawa to do this job. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So other jurisdictions have a lot more political staff that can make those connections. I don't have a breakdown of other jurisdictions. I do have our main estimates and our business plans in front of us, and so I can discuss those, but I can't provide a list right now to the Member of positions that might be comparable in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and so on. Thank you.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Well, I think it's fair -- I'll concede it's fair you're not here to answer, nor were you here to answer for other provinces and territories. I'm curious as to the justification of the position. In other words, what are the measurables and how are they comparable to other provincial or territorial organizations. So in other words, are we doing what they do? Have we put political people there? Do we know what they're doing in a sense of why we're doing it? Because we have to know why we're doing this and what we're asking for, and that's what I'm looking for. So can I get that detail including what's the mandate of this individual. There must be some letter -- letters of patent

saying, you are going to do this, you are going to deliver that. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the mandate is to build relationships, really. We've been working with Ottawa. We've had success with some offices, federal offices. Other federal offices, they have been more difficult to engage with and get information from. And that's important to be able to have that ability, especially when we have asks that we're bringing forward to Ottawa that we need to move along. We need to make sure that they're not falling off anyone's radar and so this is an opportunity to ensure we're pushing that. I have had a lot of -- I've had reach out from federal Ministers about this position. The envoy has had a reach-out from federal officials as well, as well as Indigenous governments, so there is already a lot of interest in this, and those relationships are being built. Even just by announcing this position, we are gaining some traction in Ottawa. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll keep it short because the time is running out, and I'm sure other Members are eager to ask similar questions or other questions. But I would just say that one of the difficult challenges here is evidence-based and how does that translate to result and to say that while they're there to build relationships, that's impossible to measure which makes it wonder how do we know if we're getting value from this effort whatsoever. I don't mind doing business differently, and I've already said this in the House, I'm very disappointed in the Premier that he can have a Cabinet discussion with this and talk about it with Indigenous leaders but not at any time bring it to caucus. And that's the issue, bring it to caucus and talk to Members about it and say hey, this is what I'm looking at doing, this is what I'm hoping to achieve. And that's the problem. So what is the measurables of this particular job that we know that you're -- you know, we're committing more expenses to the government at a time when we don't have them, so I'd like to know how we're going to know what they're actually doing and how we can see it's being done. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I understand the Member's time has run out, so I'll just keep it quick that we're not committing more

resources to this. I know that was a statement that was just made, but that's not accurate. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Are there any other questions from Members? I'm going to go to the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm just going to follow up both with the previous lines of questions. First, on land claims, when -- or land rights negotiations. When were the negotiating mandates last revised for the GNWT's side of the table? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Two years into the last government. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Okay, I'm trying to do quick math. So halfway through. Is there a plan to update the current ones to reflect the priorities -- the changing priorities of this government, of the Indigenous governments, the Government of Canada potentially, and the increasingly precarious geopolitical circumstances we find ourselves in? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. And I know we're not quite in the intergovernmental Indigenous relations section yet, but I can speak to this.

So the Government of Canada has -- you know, seems to have an always evolving approach to negotiations, and I think at the same time that we're trying to figure out what that evolution means for the negotiations, the Government of Canada is trying to figure out what it means for negotiations as well, and so we are trying to understand that to help us land on mandates, so. And, you know, with changes in governments, there's also considerations that need to be taken into account, you know, what is an incoming government's willingness to engage with Indigenous governments and to try different things in negotiations, how are they going to change course, so all of those things do have to be taken into consideration. The mandates, the negotiations don't happen in a vacuum. They do happen in the real world. So those are all live considerations that the Member raised. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. I appreciate that we might have a coming opportunity with at least a change in leadership -- or a guaranteed change in leadership at the federal table at least. Are we able to commit to new offers within -- new offers at all outstanding tables in the life of this government? Is that something the Premier is willing to do? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Well, I can't speak to every single table but, you know, it's very -- it could be a possibility for sure. I'm hoping to move things along in the way that they need to be moved because, you know, we're only here four years, and I do want to see movement on these. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. That's good news to hear. Can -- is -- I'm not sure if this has been done but it certainly is something -- it's one thing to have modern treaty or a claims -- a comprehensive claims process, but some -- in many cases, treaty obligations aren't being met by the Crown and the agents of the Crown. So can the Premier speak to this or commit to an analysis of outstanding treaty obligations that the GNWT might have to its signed treaties, so not the stuff that's not done, but the stuff it has done, and take an inventory, what's outstanding and what still needs to be delivered in terms of treaty obligations to our treaty partners. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Maybe I could get the deputy minister to chime in on that one. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. With respect to the GNWT's relationship with Indigenous governments and organizations in general, we are examining our general approach. We do think that because it's such an ever-changing environment, we need to provide updated guidance to staff at all levels across departments and agencies. And I would say that with respect to the Member's question, modern treaty partners are a specific subset of Indigenous governments and organizations

that require even additional attention and care given the duty of the Crown and those relationships. So we're looking at providing guidance specific to them which would be a new development for us. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. That's very proactive and positive, and I appreciate taking those steps. And I appreciate the indulgence of asking these questions at this section that I thought to jump on -- ride other people's coattails.

Moving towards the envoy position, I'm wondering if -- do we currently have a contract or do we contract government relation services from firms, like lobbyist firms essentially, to support our efforts to engage with not just the federal government -- well, primarily the federal government, but other governments and organizations? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So we don't have a formal contract in place with such an entity but we have used services of, you know, firms in Ottawa, especially when we were travelling down for the -- with the Council of Leaders or as part of the Council of Leaders, and they helped, you know, set up meetings and even things like arranging media interviews and things like that. So, yes, we have used those services in the past. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. Yes, and I would encourage you to make use of those professional services. Ottawa is a fierce beast when it comes to politics, of course, as I'm sure everyone's aware, and having people who are used to navigating those waters is probably the best value for money we can do. I appreciate this kind of novel approach to assigning an envoy but when you -- I quickly Googled special or senior envoys in Canada, and most of the results that come back are about envoy -- like, the Government of Alberta has an envoy to the United States specifically around the energy relationship there. Quebec has some envoys to the United Nations, economic and social organizations. And Canada, of course, has many envoys to the Pacific, to Syria, to countries and nations. So it just feels to me -- and perhaps that's because I'm a bit of a nerd on this stuff -- that it's kind of reaching to the realm of, like, foreign affairs. So it -- but I appreciate what the role is supposed to do. But I wonder if instead we just use those resources

to retain, you know, political staff rather than bureaucratic staff to engage in decision makers, and we get more value for money. I mean, this is something that I can tell you from my own experience that I have seen those -- that approach yield far more results. And I know the Premier is well aware of Bob McLeod's red alert, and at the time I was skeptical of it, and in hindsight I think it was a brilliant idea, and I think it really raised attention on northern issues and the challenges that the government was facing at the time. And I know that was facilitated by engaging with experts at messaging and political -- and government relations. So I just wonder again, like, are we trying to -- do we have the right tool for the job, right? Are we -- you know, are we trying to fit a square peg into a round hole when we could be using contracted services who are experts in this for less cost and more results? So I know the Premier has a perspective on that, but I share these concerns around, you know, was this the right evidence-based decision and most efficient use of our resources in engaging with the federal government. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And so, you know, I'm -- we're very willing to and we do engage those types of services as and when required in Ottawa, and I understand what the Member is saying that, you know, a lot of the work in Ottawa -- to get things done in Ottawa, sometimes you need to go out for supper with people, you need to, you know, hang out in the crowd and hear what people are talking about and get insight into, you know, what Ministers' offices you need to talk or what person you need to contact or where the money might be. And so that type of work, you know, we do work with folks in Ottawa to get that type of understanding. The senior envoy role is a political role, very political role, and it would be complementary to those types of efforts as well. I can leave it at that for now. I don't have to take up too much of the Member's time. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Yeah, thank you. And I mean, it's hard to -- because it is a political role, it's hard to assess it as you would with GRI or one of those tools that we've been trying to use for evidence-based decision-making. But I just -- I fear that we're not going to get the best result possible from an expensive singular role when we could spread it out across contracts and, you know, have those people who are working in those circles and get more awareness of what's happening on the ground and more

influence for our government on the ground as well. So I don't need a response from the Premier, but those are my concerns. We'll see how it works. Again, this is something that Bob McLeod's government did as well. There was an ADM in Ottawa for a while, and I don't think it made a huge difference. And I don't think it made as much of a difference as the red alert and those kinds of efforts to raise the profile of the territory to the federal government. So those are my concerns. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, as I know the Premier is aware, the Yukon territory has set up an Arctic security advisory council. They've assembled a fairly impressive team there to work on issues around Arctic security. They've got a major -- a retired major general there, Joyce on there, who was -- his career included appointments to the privy council office as a military advisor. They've got Dr. Ken Coates who is chairing that committee. And I think, given what's happening nationally, given the -- you know, we heard today -- I think Minister Blair announced ten NOSH sites, northern -- I forget what the acronym stands for -- but one in Yellowknife, one in Inuvik, one in Iqaluit, which -- you know, which is good news. Has the Premier considered or is the Premier considering setting up a Northwest Territories security advisory council? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So I believe we actually have an observer on the committee. We've been -- you know, and I've been in talks with the Premier of the Yukon on this and talking about how we can better collaborate, and as the three northern territories, we do collaborate on these types of initiatives. Every chance we get, we get up in front of a microphone and we talk about these security issues. You know, there's a good relationship at the official level between my deputy minister and staff in the department of defence. And I can say that I've seen that relationship -- I'll say it's improved in the sense that the federal government now appears to know that they should come talk to us when things are happening, so if they plan on announcing something, you know, we don't get a ten-minute head's up anymore, it's -- there's some more engagement beforehand. There's more willingness at the political and official level to reach out and actually engage and talk about, you know, what might be needed going forward. And I always raise myself when I speak with

federal counterparts, whether it's public safety or defence, that, you know, we need to be engaged if there is going to be any sort of investments in the North because, you know, if there's going to be a new base or new facilities in a community, maybe they need a new treatment -- or a water treatment centre, maybe they -- water treatment plant, maybe they need to improve the highway infrastructure around there. So there's -- maybe they need new childcare spaces to accommodate, you know, additional personnel that might be in the community. So those conversations have grown and strengthened over the past year, and I think we're going in the right direction. Thank you.

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

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And, yeah, listen, in no way am I insinuating that the work that's being done currently by DMs, and certainly by the Premier's office. Hasn't been good work. And I just wanted to correct myself, so the Northern Operational Support Hubs is what the -- what Minister Blair was talking about, Mr. Chair, and they'll be located in Inuvik, Yellowknife, and Iqaluit, and it appears they're planning on putting some personnel in there too, so I think this is great news. But I just think as a -- you know, as part of that, I think it just gives it more oomph, if you will, Mr. Chair, to have that advisory council put in place to get some expertise on there outside of the political realm as well with, you know, when you see what the Yukon has done with retired major generals on their committee, and I think that gives us, then, a little more expertise and a little more depth when we're in Ottawa and explaining to some folks, as we often have to do, where the Arctic is, you know, what's taking place, the fact that we have a NORAD base in Inuvik that we -- you know, there's a forward operating location there, that we expanded the airport, and those are the messages that we need to get out so when, you know, spending does come our way from DND and we -- you know, we're talking about the Mackenzie Valley Highway and, you know, maybe there's an opportunity there too and working with the Department of National Defence to look at some potential funding for that. But these are, you know, the big pictures. So I just, I guess -- and, again, I appreciate what the Premier is saying, but I think having that advisory council in place gives us that little more kick, if you will, Mr. Chair, for that -- to negotiate that to look at how, you know, again Ottawa looking at the North right now and how we need to make sure that we are certainly not missing the boat. Not to say that the Yukon is

ahead of us but certainly, you know, the Yukon having that security advisory council in place, I just think it would make sense for us to do it as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, I take that as a comment unless the Minister -- I'll go to the Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, thank you very much. And so, you know, we do have access to some of the same academic advice that that advisory council is receiving. We are looking at developing a -- sort of a public basic policy around defence. I mean, we're not tasked with national defence, but it's clearly being put -- thrust in the spotlight and we need to be able to deal with it, so we're looking at how do we best do that in a very structured manner and what are the interests of our jurisdiction in that world. And also, you know, the Yukon, they do have their council, but we have the Joint Task Force North headquarters and the forward operating location in Inuvik. So in terms of that conversation, we're light years ahead of where the Yukon are right now, and so we have -- you know, Cabinet was meeting with Joint Task Force North with, you know, the senior staff there, the commanders, and we got those briefings. The deputy minister and others regularly are in contact with the Joint Task Force North. So we're in a different position from the Yukon. That being said, I understand where the Member's coming from, and we are trying to shore up our own defence policy, for lack of a better word. Thank you.

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

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, and I appreciate that. And, again, and I know from conversations I've had the Premier, with his staff, that it's not -- not that we're not doing any work here, because I -- and I appreciate and I realize they are. And I don't need a response but I'll just read the -- what the Yukon security advisory council had sent out in their press release: A strong and secure North is critical to a strong and secure Canada. The Yukon is at the forefront of issues related to Arctic security and, accordingly, the Government of the Yukon remains committed to working with the federal government and global partners on matters of security and defence for the benefit of all Yukoners.

You know, those are the kind of statements coming from a council that I think can or does resonate. I appreciate what the Premier is saying, though, however, and I have no further questions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you very much. Next on my list I have is the Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My comment's on the creation of this envoy position but actually I gave it some thought there after I seen the article and read about it, and very similar through experiences, I thought it was a very good choice of actions to staff the unstaffed strategies this government depends quite a bit on our federal counterparts for resources and supports, and what better engagement is to have a one on one with our federal counterpart. Some things are best said in person, some things are best demonstrated through PowerPoint presentations, and I think there's a lot of merit to this decision to staff that strategy followed by implementing the strategy designing our conventions to encourage more resources. We have an Arctic foreign policy. The policy is only as good on the rewards and the fruits of our government's efforts to bring solutions to the North, similarly to my colleague from Boot Lake had mentioned.

So I see a lot of value at the end of the day to this decision, and experiencing and similarly to my past private contracting life, we did see a lot of opportunities from the oil and gas clients, so periodic sales trips were made to Calgary, and getting prepared for their incoming presence for the projects they had and having knowledge of that encouraged us to witness what other similar larger companies were actually doing.

One company in particular, who I've worked with, had a full-time salesman in Calgary. He had a credit card. He had an apartment. He had a vehicle. And that was his task, was to go and solicit opportunities. So that concept exists all over. There's current lobbyists on behalf of large companies doing that same business right this very moment in Calgary.

So our government needs an office there and a presence there and a strategy and a staff to implement those strategies. So I really see a lot of merit to that choice. So I just share my comments with experience there, Mr. Chair, and endorse that choice. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Are there any other Members that want to make comments? Okay, thank you. Moving on, no further questions, please turn to page 124.

Executive and Indigenous Affairs, Cabinet support, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$2,443,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to corporate communications beginning on page 126 with information items on page 128. Are there any questions? I am going to go to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So looking through your business plan update for 2025-2026, I notice that the communications functional review was no longer there, so can the Minister explain if that is now complete. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I'll pass that to the deputy minister.

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

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The functional review -- well, I should say since the last update on that, we've changed staffing leadership within our corporate communications division within the department. We've taken a look at the functional review and determined that while we'll use some of the lessons learned in previous versions of reviews, what we'll likely focus on doing going forward is engaging with the comms community within and across the GNWT to make sure that what we're doing as a system, and how we're supporting communicators within departments, is effective and helps them address their needs and pressures they're receiving from within their departments and within the sectors they serve. So that's the shift of focus at this point. So at this point, the review is no longer going to proceed at least in the way that was originally envisioned coming out of the last Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's cautiously good news, I think, personally. But I do want to commend the Minister and his staff for listening to communication staff across the government. They do a lot of good work, and supports are definitely needed for them. So actually, yeah, pretty good to hear.

What I would like to know, if the Minister can elaborate on if there is a new approach being considered and if there is any sort of metrics or benchmarks that we were hoping to reach in terms of how we're showing that we're giving those folks good support. I'd love to hear it. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: I'll hand it to the deputy minister.

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

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wouldn't say that there's a new approach being contemplated yet. I think we have a number of policies that guide the function of communications across government, whether that be in relation to Cabinet communications on the political side, corporate communications, and at the departmental level. From a procedural standpoint, we're not looking at making major adjustments but, again, going back to the Member's previous questions, if we hear from individuals within the comms community that things are, for example, perhaps too cumbersome in certain areas, we want to try to attend to those experiences and observations, so I think we're open to that. But at this point in time, no substantive major changes to approach are being contemplated, at least in advance of that engagement. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just one more question on this which is will the results of an engagement with the comms community be shared with Members. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Absolutely, that would be something given some interest in corporate communications, we could provide a presentation or a briefing once that information has been completed. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nothing further on this item.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Any further questions from Members? Okay, no further questions, please turn to page 127.

Executive and Indigenous Affairs, corporate communication, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$1,541,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving to the executive council offices beginning on page 129 with information items

on page 131. Are there any questions? No further questions, please turn to page 130.

Executive and Indigenous Affairs, executive council offices, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$4,312,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to gender equality -- oh, sorry, gender equity beginning on page 132 with information items on page 135. Are there any questions? I'm going to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, in the update updated to the business plan for this year, EIA is speaking to additional work on MMIWG, which is always a good thing. Can the Minister please explain what the purpose and expected results of the MMIWG advisory committee are. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: I'll hand it to the deputy minister through you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The advisory committee is intended to serve an important role in making sure that the GNWT is hearing from people with lived experiences in this space. So that is the primary driver to make sure that we're not working on this important action plan in isolation. So having that perspective -- those perspectives from across the territory are important to provide a feedback on the actions within the action plan. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Back to the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that answer. It says here that as of printing, the terms of reference for this committee is completed, there are letters to IGEs being distributed to invite folks to join the advisory committee. Can the Minister or his staff please explain the current status of the committee. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe that at this point, there are efforts underway to follow up with partner governments to ensure that we have the

appropriate representation from across the territory to serve on the committee. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Yeah, no, thank you, Mr. Chair. That's really good to hear, and I think that will really benefit the work that the GNWT is doing on this particular item and the calls to justice. So no, very happy to hear about this work being done. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nothing further.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Any Members to have questions? Okay, thank you. No further questions, please turn to page 133.

Executive and Indigenous Affairs, gender equity, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$3,755,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving on to governance and services integration on page 136 with information items on page 139. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member Frame Lake -- sorry. Member from Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I just wanted to speak to the non-government organization stabilization fund, and mostly what I'm curious about is I had been asking the Minister in a previous sitting of the Assembly about the plan to stabilize funding for NGOs and stabilize support for them. I'm just looking for an update. I note that this budget item hasn't changed in a while, and if anything, it's reduced. So can the Minister give us an update on this because he has committed in the House to strengthening this sector and to focusing the work to strengthen and help this sector as a result of the report that was published recently. I don't have the name of the report on hand, but if the Minister could give us an update on that work, it would be appreciated. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So the NGO stabilization fund that -- previously with Department of MACA is one of the line items that we have inherited as we work towards integrating services across government starting with how we work with the NGO sector. And so for now, this year, it is a status quo for that NGO stabilization fund, but we are planning on engaging with the NGO sector to determine how we move forward with the suite of programs that we really use to support this

sector right now, and that work is to begin this year. 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 so, yeah, unfortunately, I don't have the -- I can't remember the name of the report off the top of my head, but, you know, the Premier has in hand a report that was very recently done that was all about everything that needs to be done, so now he's talking about engagement. I would just note the engagement was done. I was asking about implementation of that, and, you know, the Premier had committed previously on the floor of the House to, you know, implementing that report. So that's what I was asking about is the progress we're making on engagement that's already been done. We already have the answers we're looking for. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I misheard part of the Member's question earlier. So I'll hand it to the deputy minister for some more information on this. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Recently, the department issued a release whereby we announced a new position dedicated to strengthening the relationship with non-governmental organizations, charitable organizations. So since having a person in that position, that individual has embarked on outreach with major NGOs, going to their offices or their sites and listening to them and hearing about their issues. The report that the Member referenced is a live topic of conversation, so we're looking at making sure that implementing recommendations in that report is part of our work plan as we start to shift within the GNWT how departments and agencies work in partnership with -- or with NGOs. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. MORSE: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. And I do apologize. The way I structured the question probably wasn't the clearest, and I appreciate the answer from the deputy minister on that. I am happy to hear that work is progressing on implementation of that report and continue to encourage the department to keep working on that because, yeah, support for NGOs is important, and just want to

emphasize the fact that we did the engagement, we have the answers. It's about implementation now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Both the deputy minister and I are not a fan of endless reviews and action plans and strategies. We're more -- we're fans of action, so I'm on board with the Member. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Any further questions from Member from Frame Lake?

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Not at this time.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wanted to start by asking -- I mean, a big priority of this unit is to implement the NWT -- or the GNWT's homelessness strategy, A Way Home. Can the Minister explain how much money out of this budget is specifically allocated to implementing the homelessness strategy? Are we to assume that the \$1.4 million under strategic approach to homelessness is the implementation of that strategy, or is there more nuance to what is being spent on implementing the strategy? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the total is beyond that. We've had a number of initiatives so far in this fiscal year that we have expended money on, the on-the-land camp, and we are -- or have -- receiving federal funds for transitional housing. For a bit of a breakdown, I can pass it maybe to the deputy minister. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. What the Member will note in the main estimates, we'll have \$3,686,000 related to the homelessness strategy as well as the federal funding from public safety Canada in association with the NWT wraparound services or integrated service delivery. That's another \$824,000. So broadly speaking, both of those funds will be used largely in support of advancing integrated service delivery as a service model in government, and we're using homelessness issues as the focal point for integrated service delivery. So there's some

overlap in those funds that are being directed towards that purpose. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So thank you for clarifying that. Is there anywhere that there's a report currently available or being produced that looks at the action items in the homelessness strategy and goes through and says which have been achieved or underway or, you know, what is the update on progress on each of the items? Is that available online somewhere or publicly? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So we are working on a tracker that we can share with committee. It's not, you know, available right now, but, yes, that work is underway. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can the Minister give us an estimate of when we might expect to see that tracker? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Next month. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you for that. That will be helpful. I do look forward to going through that closely. I wanted to ask for more details on the NWT wraparound services. I understand that the GNWT portion is just a small portion of the program because we're getting a lot of federal funds to complement that. Can you explain better what specific programs the NWT wraparound services supports? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So largely the work of -- or the funding associated with the wraparound services is being used to advance a model of integrated service delivery for the GNWT. So as mentioned in a previous response to the Member, the -- we're using homelessness, the needs around transitional housing, as a focal point for testing and proving our model of integrated service delivery. So some examples of uses for that funding are, you know, helping

us with governance structure, internal governance structure reform recommendations, training for staff, internal communications to shift culture, evaluation work around, like, logic model planning of program structure, among other things. So it's really about helping us to make sure that as we're prepared to roll out regional locations where we're implementing integrated service delivery that we're prepared to do so in an effective manner. 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. I am hopeful that we can discuss this in more detail in committee to get sort of more of a breakdown on what exactly is being done, but perhaps next month when the tracker's available, that will also help us look through it in more detail. I also just wanted to note -- and I mentioned this last night with the housing Minister that we generally are still seeing that non-profits, including those helping to address homelessness, are getting the same amounts of funding year after year without accounting for inflation, and I understand that there are intentions to try to look at that and figure out how we can, like, support NGOs to give them a realistic amount of money. Can the Premier -- or the Minister give us an update on be that initiative is at and when we can expect to see non-profits start to get some increases to their funding in line with inflation and forced growth. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And the NGO support position that was referenced earlier has already begun having some of those conversations with NGOs to talk about some of those funding challenges and to hear from them. We do recognize that there has been a funding gap and that NGOs have been left behind and that in some respects that has led to certain NGOs vacating critical space and providing critical services to vulnerable people in the territory. So we're, of course, looking at for the upcoming fiscal year -- you know, across government looking for opportunities to increase funding where possible within existing budgets, but, really, more importantly, with the upcoming next year fiscal cycle look at as part of our work plan introducing more regularly scheduled forced growth cycles for NGOs as well as departments. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do think that is very important to -- you know, by next budget season, to have a very intentional system that we can show in the budget that we are planning for forced growth and inflation in the grants and contributions that we give to those non-profits providing those essential services. So I'm glad to hear that that is a goal, and I do really urge the department to prioritize this to make sure that by next year budget cycle we have that in place. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I agree. And part of the issue is -- just as sort of an education piece for the NGOs, you know, government is very -- almost regimented in the budgeting cycle, and we need to ensure that NGOs are aware of where we are in that cycle. You know, everyone has to be their own advocate, and so we will work with the NGOs but we also want to empower them to advocate when they need to to ensure that they're keeping us honest as well. So thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'll go back to the Member -- oh, okay. Thank you. Next on my list I have is the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So along the line of integrated service delivery and little bit expanding, I think, on what my colleague was speaking to, I note in the business plan, and from corresponding with the Minister and his team, that we are expecting that ISD will move next into Inuvik and Fort Simpson this year. Hopefully that is still on track. But my question is about functional zero goals which EIA has noted will be established with integrated teams by the -- almost the end of this Assembly, March 2027. So my question is do we have a targeted timeline for which communities we're working with first? Would it be the communities where we have ISD teams first and then moving out from there regionally, or what will be our approach? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

MR. JOHN MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think when it comes to the communities that we've identified as likely communities for regional integrated service sites, and again focusing at least initially on homelessness, those communities are -- Yellowknife is already there because we have an integrated team. Much work to do there. But we have folks involved in that. Inuvik would be our next site. Fort Simpson, Hay River, and we've certainly identified Behchoko as another potential, and

we've broached that conversation with the Tlicho government and TCSA as well, so that's yet to be determined. But in each of those instances, there is a sequence of events that needs to occur to prepare to go and launch that initiative in those communities. First and foremost, engaging with Indigenous governments, looking at which staff need training and then delivering training, communications around that launch, and then working on things like reducing privacy barriers within those staffed, co-locating staff. So there's a work plan in development around each of those communities because each of them has unique circumstances associated with them. 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. And thank you for that detailed answer. That's good information. So building on the deputy minister's answer, then -- and I'm very glad to hear that he mentioned that working with Indigenous governments is key and crucial. Is there work in this envelope between EIA and the Council of Leaders of how we are seeking more dollars for these issues that are being addressed under A Way Home? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So it hasn't formally come up at the Council of Leaders. At the upcoming Council of Leaders, I believe that anti-poverty initiatives are on the agenda, and so there's an opportunity to broach that subject and have a discussion there. Thank you.

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

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nothing further.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'm going to continue on now with the Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the -- we're talking about government and governance and service integration, and I was -- the Nunavut budget just came out, and they have been working on realignment of their departments, and they have a new Department of Community Services and the goal of that department is to establish a one-stop shop for territorial government services called Service Nunavut. Now, we have GSOs, had them for quite some time. They are amazingly helpful to small communities, to regional centres. We don't have a one-stop shop here in Yellowknife.

We have some integrated service units that provide support for individual clients who need to -- and system navigators for various departments, but we don't have that kind of, you know, Greenstone Building approach like we do for the federal government here in Yellowknife for the Service Canada office. We see our sister territory moving towards this model. It's something that I'm very supportive of. We know it works because we have this great GSO officers. Is this something that the department is exploring, a one-stop shop Service NWT? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And I know the Member is a fluent French Speaker, and so we do have Services TNO in Yellowknife which is sort of what the Member's referring to in some ways, a one-stop shop. But we are making incremental moves towards a -- potentially towards a service model like the Member is talking about. In different jurisdictions across Canada, they do have, you know, service, you know, whatever, whatever province you're in, that's the service department. And so that is an opportunity.

One thing that I didn't want to do here was try and overhaul everything all at once. You know, it's a lot of work, really, to integrate services and so we're taking an incremental approach beginning with this focus on homelessness, on co-locating services, looking at our website and redesigning the website to ensure it's more client-centered, and going down that path with the understanding that at some point that could evolve into something where it is a one-stop shop, and that would integrate some of the work that's being done by, like, infrastructure and finance to consolidate application processes for certain things. So we are heading in that direction, but not in this budget, unfortunately. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. And, yes, it is -- it's great if you're a Franco-Ténois, you absolutely can access one-stop shop. There's some issues there as well, but it does exist. So there's funding out there, clearly, because that's how a lot of the Francophone services we do provide are through federal government funding specifically for Francophones and, of course, the funding for other language minorities is much more limited because they're not official languages of Canada. But I wonder if there -- Indigenous Services Canada has client officers and things like that, so there's a lot of client facing public agencies in Canada that are

operating to some degree in the Northwest Territories. Is it possible to do more than co-locate some of these services and actually find -- enter into like an MOU with Service Canada or with Indigenous Services Canada to get money from them, match it with our own money and build our own -- and expedite this process. Because I think the easier -- the -- if we can eliminate as many barriers as possible to Northerners accessing government services, we're going to -- it's going to improve everything, and it's going to be a big cost saver to the government as well because you won't -- you'll eliminate duplication and get service delivery working better and more cost effective. So have we explored that building on a relationship with Service Canada to have either them provide territorial services or for us to provide a hybrid model of federal and territorial services? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And just to be clear, there is some structural change. It's not an overhaul but we did bring the GSOs into this division. You know, we created this division. We brought the integrated case management team from justice into this division. So we are slowly and incrementally doing the work that the Member is talking about. And I appreciate that his zeal for this, you know, I -- it features prominently in the mandate because I recognize the importance of integrating services and making things easier for residents. We do actually have an MOU with Service Canada and the GSOs can provide some of those same services as Service Canada, and so that does exist. And, you know, we'd always be happy to look at opportunities to expand that. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you. And thank you to the Premier for this. I mean, this is an area we do agree on. I'm glad it's in the mandate. I just want to see it moving as quickly as possible. So I'll probably continue to raise this issue going forward. But I think those -- and I want to just give a shout out to integrated service delivery as well. Like I've -- we've directed many -- I've done a Member's statement on it, we've directed many constituents there, and I'll just take the opportunity to say they do amazing work. It is not an easy job to provide that care, but I know constituents and clients really do value the service they get from this unit, and all those staff people deserve a probably -- they all deserve a Premier's award. Maybe you can do that. Yeah, like, keep up the path forward, and if there's anything we can do to expedite it

through, you know, our work on this side of the House, we'd be more than happy to do that. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I appreciate those comments.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. No further comments. I'll continue on to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I'm just wondering if the -- if there could be maybe some information provided why we still keep the strategic approach to homelessness under the department of the executive. Anyone I speak to seems to think it should be aligned better with housing corp and, generally speaking, I mean, it's -- just seems as if it's a line misplaced and not misused but alignment of goals, objective, you know, when you add transition or process this, housing opportunities this, I mean it would only make sense that it would be under the correct window. And that's not saying that it wasn't put here for a purpose and a reason. I sometimes recognize people have to step in. And perhaps the -- this would be a good time to talk about where it should properly be aligned. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So in the past, there have been attempts at integrating services in the GNWT, and they haven't been successful, and so a few years ago the GNWT went out and they worked with a contractor to look at those efforts and a path forward, and what the recommendation was and, you know, was -- I think it was widely accepted among those in government who were working on this initiative as well was that instead of trying to integrate everything at once, well, they start with a specific area and build from there. And so homelessness was that area. You know, at the time it was a, you know -- and still is obviously a growing issue in the Northwest Territories and involves a number of different departments and agencies, and so it made sense to try and use that as the avenue to build that. You know, we are learning a lot of lessons from it. One of the lessons is that, you know, homelessness is all encompassing and it is a lot of focus -- there's a lot of focus on dealing with the homelessness issue of the day, which is very immediate and maybe not as much time to integrate services as we would have liked. And so I appreciate the Member's comments and, you know, I have been considering whether or not it is better

placed in a different department, so I will take those comments from the Member and factor that into the decision on where this goes. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Okay, thank you. I'll go back to the Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I'm not looking when I say in this next comment about hiring a fleet or futile staff, but I think some evaluation has to be put to this question which is is it better suited elsewhere. We could easily argue that the homelessness could be in housing. We could talk about a cross pollination of issues in the sense of well, there's, you know, health issues, maybe it should be in health. You know, I don't think it should be, but I'm just saying we could justify it anywhere, and I'm just asking is there any chance of evaluating and maybe we'll see this in the -- in my humble opinion, that is, that it sits under the shingle of housing which homelessness might be better tied to. So I mean, is there any chance of an analysis happening? And I don't mean, again, hire fleets of staff, just more of a -- one of those -- a danish, a coffee, and some good soul searching kind of considerations. I don't know what's appropriate, but I'm saying it doesn't need to be massive -- a massive undertaking. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, no. I think we're on the same page. I mean, that's what we're doing. I've ate plenty of danishes in this building, and I drink plenty of coffee, and I contemplate things like this. And so I -- you know, I'm happy to hear that the Member's perspective on this is similar to mine and, yeah, I value the feedback. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Speaking of danishes, I'll go back to YK Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Well, for someone who hasn't eaten a danish in ten years, I'll live vicariously through the menu of the Premier. But in all seriousness, there -- are there programs that although today might not be the right day -- I mean, it's the old we could try to force it through and we both -- we all know that that'll never happen, but -- so I not suggest it. But, I mean, there needs to be sort of some overall evaluation of how we do grants, contributions, and even organize business. No disrespect to the department of MACA, but I've often questioned, like, why do we have communities and community relationships under MACA. Why isn't that through EIA because of the

interrelationship of chiefs and councils and mayors and councils and regional councils. You know, they all want to speak to the Premier. I mean, I appreciate that, you know, maybe the -- maybe the MACA Minister can do a break dance or karaoke at the municipal meetings and things like that, but the truth be told is they all want to speak to the money which is the -- and the head of government. And that's probably where we have most of our meetings at the end of the day. They all keep coming in their delegations. So I mean, when we're starting to think broader, this is not an ask to do, this is ask to think about, which is we should be asking ourselves how we realign certain departments with respect to where they sit.

Some of my colleagues might say -- and might not agree with either, and that's fine -- you know, is youth better placed in education as an example. And I'm not here to tear MACA apart piece by piece, but I'd be willing to do it in the sense of the examples. You know, like, different things, you know, does lotteries belong in justice. So, I mean, in the context of EIA specifically, Mr. Chairman, I mean, there are different things that would align, I think, much better back to the interrelationships of these things, and I point it out more -- more in line of municipal issues and municipal funding under grants and contributions, especially given the nature of the councils, chiefs, regional issues, and it all lines up with the intergovernmental affairs experience. So, again, not an ask or request or demand to do. The request is really about is what thoughts could be put into it about better integration and with the leadership working with direct leadership. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And there's a lot to unpack here so I'll start with the -- you know, the homelessness piece and why it's here. And as I mentioned, it was about integrating services. And so we have integrated service delivery and we have basically the homelessness file, and we were attempting to -- we are attempting to advance integrated service delivery through working on the homelessness file. And the reason it's -- this integrated service delivery and homelessness are in EIA is because integrated service delivery was formerly under the Department of Justice, and it's tough to get people to listen to the Department of Justice; it's easier to get people to listen to something coming out of the Premier's office and so we can, you know, force departments' hand a bit more when it comes to integrated services. That being said, the focus on homelessness has in some ways overtaken some of the work on integrated service delivery, and so I am thinking about, you know, the

placement of things like that. And in terms of the broader question about -- you know, I've heard the conversation many times that MACA could be sort of divvied up and parts of it put in other departments. I think that the access that community leaders have right now to a Cabinet Member is probably better than it would be if it was under the Premier. There's only so many hours in the day, and I want to make sure that I'm available to, you know, Indigenous leaders, you know, all of my federal counterparts, MLAs, and I wouldn't want all the mayors and councillors to be squeezed out, and so I think that having a dedicated MACA Minister who is that direct line to communities, it still has a lot of value to it. That being said, I'm always happy to look at -- we're always continuously looking at how we operate and if there's better ways to do it, and I try to balance that with the fact that organizational change can suck all the air out of the room and everything else can stop moving ahead while you do that organizational change and people get up to speed on the new roles and all of that work as well. So it's a bit of a balancing act, but I appreciate the Member's comments. Thank you.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a minor comment, although it may not be exactly on this page, but I ask for your grace on allowing.

One of the -- it was mentioned by the Premier about the integrated service process, and I just would be -- I'd disappoint myself if I didn't highlight this area which is one of the challenges I often hear when it's being led by initiative and across multi-departments is no one's in charge. And, you know, so not picking on anyone in particular, but I'll just say the ECC Minister is the lead of something -- I'm just not picking on you -- but the problem is it integrates other departments and so the ECC Minister is not in charge of the staff under MACA, and hence, you know -- and health, etcetera, and everybody seems to coalesce in some way the night before the report's due but the fact is that there's no way to work with them together because they have to keep going up and down, up and down, and there's no lateral support or reporting lines; it's literally a mess, and it's difficult -- and I hear this from the staff, the management, the leadership within, that the fact is that, you know, the ECC DM or director and that can't tell an employee in MACA what to do and hence they don't do it so people are all saddled with, you know, hot potatoing issues around. So just as a reminder that, you know, as the phrase is brought up, you know, there's got to be a better way to do this. I'm not sure

what the better way is, but I'm just going to say is we have some pretty smart people that I acknowledge that can find a better way to do business, and this is just one area I thought I'd mention given the opportunity. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Did the Minister want to respond?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Sure, yes, I can make some comments on that. So, you know, there are cases where the departments do have integrated teams, and so while you might not have the DM from one department directing an employee from another department, there is integration. So there's those internal structures in place. And the reason that this is under EIA and the Premier's office is because I recognize the difficulties in getting departments to work together. I was Minister of ECE. I was Minister of Justice. I had difficulty getting ECE and justice to work together. So I'm very much aware of these issues, and working to address them. Thank you.

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

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think it's underneath this section but within this department here. As I mentioned in my Member's statement here earlier today, and we've had some ongoing discussions with this department here for the government's presence and support to bringing food security to the Sahtu communities, and we had to postpone our last planning engagement. It's not convenient for the communities during the winter road season as they're all travelling before it closes. So we're looking at community engagements there with Food Bank Canada and Nutrition North representatives here sometime in the neighbourhood of mid April.

So I want to ask the -- I want to ask the Premier and Minister for this department, the ongoing support I would say or the continued support, I'll wait for this budget to be approved, and then I'll have my hand out knowing the numbers are going to be approved. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I am glad the Member has such confidence that this budget is going to be approved; I appreciate that. And I appreciate the Member's advocacy. I know the Sahtu has the highest cost of living in the Northwest Territories and, you know, we do have a number of programs to fund, you know, food, whether it's funding for a food bank, whether it's funding that goes directly to schools, or whether it's other programs we have

that allow for some sort of, you know, food distribution under them. And so we do have a lot of that. We are also engaged with the federal government on the Nutrition North program that will be providing feedback to the new ministerial special representative on that as well. And I do understand that there is a -- some events happening this summer and, you know, if there's an availability to meet while, you know, in Yellowknife while that organization is here, we'd be happy to do that as well. So thank you.

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

MR. McNEELY: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for the reply to that. I feel encouraged that the continued support is there. When I visit small communities, yes, the cost of living is high, cost of groceries is high, and when we hear comments and announcements made that the food program is getting another \$45,000, you should see the overwhelming smiles on the parents and teachers. So it's really encouraging to keep motivated to help our communities when you see those smiling faces. Thank you. That's more of a comment there, Mr. Chair. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll just take it as a comment and continue on. Okay, thank you. There's no -- any further questions? Okay, no further questions, please turn to page 137.

Executive and Indigenous Affairs, governance and services integration, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$11,435,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'm going to continue on. Now moving on to health care system sustainability on page 140 with information items on page 142. Are there any questions? I'm going to go to the Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

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

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): 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? Carried. The motion is carried.

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

Report of Committee of the Whole

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

MR. EDJERICON: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Bill 11, An Act to Amend the Motor Vehicles Act and Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates, and would like to report progress. And Bill 11, Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole will be concurred with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh Can I have a seconder? I think it's going to Member from Thebacha's turn. 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): Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Social Development will meet at the rise of House today.

Mr. Speaker [Translation] Orders of the day for Monday, March 3rd, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer or Reflection
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
- Oral Question 530-20(1), Senior Envoy to Government of Canada
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Acknowledgements
7. Oral Questions
8. Written Questions
9. Returns to Written Questions
- Written Question 13-20(1), Physician Staffing
10. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
11. Petitions
12. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills

13. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
14. Tabling of Documents
15. Notices of Motions
16. Motions
17. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
18. First Reading of Bills
19. Second Reading of Bills
20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates
21. Report of Committee of the Whole
22. Third Reading of Bills
 - Bill 11, An Act to Amend the Motor Vehicles Act
23. Orders of the Day

[Translation Ends] Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Mahsi Cho, Mr. Clerk. Great way to end a Special Languages Month.

This House stands adjourned until Monday, March 3rd, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 1:36 p.m.

Unedited Hansard