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The Honourable Paul Delorey, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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**Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
Wednesday, February 6, 2008**

Members Present

Mr. Abernethy, Mr. Beaulieu, Ms. Bisaro, Mr. Bromley, Hon. Paul Delorey, Mrs. Groenewegen, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Krutko, Hon. Jackson Lafferty, Hon. Sandy Lee, Hon. Bob McLeod, Hon. Michael McLeod, Mr. McLeod, Hon. Michael Miltenberger, Mr. Ramsay, Hon. Floyd Roland, Hon. Norman Yakeleya.

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

Prayer.

Speaker (Hon. Paul Delorey): Good morning, colleagues. Welcome back to the House.

Item 2, Ministers' statements. Hon. Michael McLeod.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 5-16(2)
WOOD PELLET BOILER SYSTEM FOR
NORTH SLAVE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

Hon. Michael McLeod: Mr. Speaker, energy costs are a concern to all of us. Public Works and Services has had the opportunity to test out a more economically and environmentally friendly alternative energy source at the North Slave Correctional Facility.

Providing heat for buildings using wood pellet boilers has been common practice in Europe for decades. It has provided reliable heating for hotels, office buildings and recreational facilities from Austria to Siberia. These systems save money due to the use of less expensive wood by-products, specifically crushed sawdust pellets. They also significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2006 the North Slave Correctional Facility needed a boiler to provide back-up heat. Capital of \$225,000 was approved for this boiler. Arctic Green Energy, a northern company in Yellowknife, proposed to provide a wood pellet burning boiler system instead of the third oil-fired boiler. It would be the primary heating unit and would be designed to meet 90 per cent of the heating requirements for the facility.

The company was responsible for the design, installation, operation and maintenance of the wood pellet system and for the provision of the pellets. It also acts as an energy service provider, billing the G.N.W.T. only for heat supplied to the facility.

The system includes a storage unit to hold adequate wood pellets for one month's required output in winter conditions. This enables the system to continue to operate during ferry and ice-road closures.

The benefits from the wood pellet system were expected to include capital savings of \$225,000 from not installing the third oil-fired boiler, an estimated \$50,000 annual savings in heating costs for the facility, and an estimated reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 1,450 tonnes annually.

Mr. Speaker, we are pleased to report that these expectations were successfully met. The heating system has been operating reliably for a full 12 months. From January 1, 2007, to December 31, 2007, the wood pellet boilers have provided approximately 90 per cent of the heating requirements for the North Slave Correctional Facility. Savings included \$57,719 because of the lower cost of wood pellets as compared to oil; \$1,500 because of a reduced requirement for chemical treatment of the system; \$1,200 because of reduced power consumption to run boilers, draft fans, and primary boiler pumps; and \$1,000 because of reduced wear and tear on existing equipment.

The wood pellet boilers have displaced 568,903 litres of heating fuel and reduced greenhouse gas emissions by a total of 1554 tonnes in one year of operation. This is equivalent to taking 315 vehicles off the road.

Mr. Speaker, PWS is currently working with various authorities to promote the use of wood pellet boilers. In 2008-2009 PWS will be studying other buildings as possible candidates for biomass boiler installations. Potential sites for biomass boiler installations may include the Department of Transportation maintenance garage and the South Mackenzie Correctional Centre in Hay River, Chief Jimmy Bruneau School in Behchoko, River Ridge Correctional Centre and Territorial Women's Correctional Centre in Fort Smith, and the South Mackenzie Correctional Centre. In 2007-2008 PWS will continue to assist the city of Yellowknife to install wood pellet boilers at the Yellowknife pool,

arena and curling rink and help Yellowknife Education District No. 1 to install the biomass boilers at Sir John Franklin High School.

Mr. Speaker: Item 3, Members' statements. Mr. Hawkins.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON G.N.W.T. VOLUNTEER SPORT ACTION PLAN

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, the G.N.W.T. Volunteer Support Initiative action plan speaks specifically about the support of volunteers in the N.W.T. Since 2005 this initiative has only paid us lip service. Today I will use my Member's statement as a plea for action supporting volunteers and volunteer organizations.

We all know what volunteers mean for our community. Volunteers ensure that sports and recreation activities take place. Volunteers do fundraising, organize food banks, assist the homeless, teach, do organize community cleanup — Mr. Speaker, the list does go on.

Ask around. Getting our community events off the ground without volunteer support is like making guacamole without avocados. These are only examples of volunteer activities, but the list of good Samaritan activities could go on and on endlessly. Volunteering contributes to good citizenship and our economy, saves the public purse money and creates the healthy community that we all live in — and not to mention, volunteerism helps all Members of this House.

Our government has to start showing our commitment to its volunteers. There is an easy way for this government to show its commitment. The G.N.W.T. can introduce a program allowing its employees to take one day per year to volunteer. We are, as a government, yet again behind the times when it comes to showing our support for volunteering and volunteer days. The benefits a volunteer day would provide would outweigh any costs. This new form of civic leadership would inspire employees to contribute to their community. It would demonstrate that the government values and recognizes the engagement in simple ways in volunteer activities. It would show that the government means action in supporting volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for our Premier later today.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES EXPLORATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, environmental and natural resources is an important issue in each of our ridings, and collectively it continues to be a critical issue across the N.W.T. Exploration and development of minerals seems to be gaining unstoppable momentum, and our once-plentiful clean water now faces questions of sustainability and even scarcity. A whole new industry has been started in environmental monitoring, in environmental assessment, in environmental impact and use. Additionally, we cannot forget about the traditional cultural practices with respect to the aboriginal people and the impacts on trapping and harvesting.

In my riding, Mr. Speaker, there's a flurry of activities that is impacting the environment and natural resources. Uranium, precious metal exploration, plans for additional hydro infrastructure, water contamination from the mammoth Alberta power plant project, the reopening of the Pine Point Mine, and renewable resource development all contribute directly and indirectly to the permanent disturbance of the natural order of ecology and wildlife patterns.

Mr. Speaker, before it gets too late, we need to review the direction we are going with respect to environment and natural resources in the Northwest Territories. We need to develop a comprehensive strategy for the Northwest Territories that will not only effectively address important environmental issues today but guide us down the road to responsible and sustainable resource development. The people of Tu Nedhe are not opposed to resource development but would like to see development that does not have an adverse impact on the environment or on their traditional pursuits.

I propose that the government commit to establishing a committee to facilitate and guide the process of developing a comprehensive environmental natural resource strategy.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON DEH CHO BRIDGE PROJECT

Mrs. Groenewegen: My Member's statement today is my letter to Sheila Fraser, the Auditor General of Canada.

"As a member of the 16th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories, I wish to bring to your attention concerns regarding the process relating to the proposed bridge over the Mackenzie River at Fort Providence.

"During the 14th Legislative Assembly a piece of legislation called the Deh Cho Bridge [Corporation]

Act was passed. The information presented to Members at the time contemplated a self-financing bridge with a capital cost of around \$60 million. The bridge would be paid for over 35 years, based on a commercial tonnage toll. The extent of the G.N.W.T.'s contribution would be the current budget for a ferry and the construction and maintenance of an ice bridge at the Mackenzie River crossing at Fort Providence. The G.N.W.T. would also provide a loan guarantee for the initial cost of planning and design to the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation. The corporation would also have an opportunity to raise up to \$5 million on that amount on which they would receive a rate of return.

"During the 15th Assembly many updates and briefings were undertaken at numerous points. Members were assured that the amount of the loan guarantee would not be increased, but it was. At another point we were assured that the project would not proceed without a significant federal government infrastructure contribution. That contribution never materialized, yet the bridge is still proceeding.

"The bridge project is now estimated to cost \$160 million. The amount of the G.N.W.T.'s input will be at least \$2 million per year indexed over 35 years, plus the annual budget of the ferry and ice crossing, and the G.N.W.T. will spend at least \$750,000 per year collecting the toll from the commercial traffic.

"After the initial passing of the Deh Cho Bridge [Corporation] Act, the Members of our Legislature have not had an opportunity to vote in favour of these many changes to the original program which I've indicated, the most substantive changes being the cost of the project and our government's financial participation in the project. As this project has progressed, the information has been difficult to get to.

"To add to the appearance of an accountability shortfall, the very important concession agreement with the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation was signed on September 28, 2007, three days before our October 1 Territorial election. This was during a transition period when it is traditionally agreed that Ministers continue to hold off but do not do things which are above and beyond routine, status quo maintenance activities in their departments — let alone signing our government up to a multi-million dollar—35 year financial commitment."

Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

Unanimous consent granted.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Thank you.

"Public/Private Partnerships are a vehicle by which other jurisdictions have acquired major capital infrastructure; however, this has not been a practice of our government. Therefore no policy regulation or legislation previously existed that would have guided this process. It is very significant in that this proposed bridge will be the single most expensive piece of capital infrastructure which our government has ever undertaken.

"When information or accountability were called for, the government has retreated to a response of confidentiality because of a third-party proponent, which is the private corporation. The equity of the proponent has also been brought into question by the fact that all the work on the project to date has been covered by a loan guarantee. Even after seven years the project's equity is very limited. And the shareholder that they have attracted to join with them is none other than the general contractor for the bridge.

To the Auditor General: I respectfully request that you examine all documents, *Hansards*, transcripts, briefings and other materials related to this project. As a Member of the Legislative Assembly, I have a public duty to the public interest to ensure that the business dealings of our government are transparent, accountable and lawful."

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON IMPACT OF PROPOSED REDUCTIONS ON CONSTITUENCY

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, my question is in response to the Premier's answers to questions asked by Mr. Hawkins in regard to the reductions that are coming forward, and also reductions in positions, programs and services. I'd like to make it clear to the Premier, as a Member who represents small aboriginal communities that are lacking basic programs and services from this government because of vacant positions that haven't been filled for years in and years out....Yet we are again going through the cuts when these communities haven't recovered from the cuts of the 13th Assembly.

I think it's important as a government that we ensure that the fundamental programs and services that are required by all residents of the Northwest Territories are delivered through ways of mental health positions, alcohol and drug positions, income support positions, policing and whatnot. But yet, Mr. Speaker, these aboriginal communities that are living in poverty continue year after year to struggle with the basic programs and services we take for granted. I think, as a government, we have a responsibility to ensure that these cuts do not affect those communities that don't even have the basic programs and services.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's crucial that we as government, and as a nation of Canada, identify the crisis that aboriginal communities are in. One of the fundamental problems they're facing is a lack of basic programs and services in their communities because of the isolation and the conditions of trying to recruit and hire professions to provide programs and services in those communities. It's a problem we face right across the Territories, especially in isolated communities where we don't have staff housing — which was cut in the 13th Assembly — where we don't have policing to give security to the mental health worker or nurse in that community to feel safe. Knowing it is a problem, yet here we go

again by cutting programs and services and people by way of a reduction program that's going to be implemented by this government.

Mr. Speaker, I for one feel that as government we have a fiduciary obligation to ensure that aboriginal people receive all programs and services that are basically provided to all other Canadians. So at the appropriate time, I will be asking the Premier a question on this matter.

**MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
AFFORDABLE HOUSING
FOR NEWLY HIRED EMPLOYEES**

Mr. Jacobson: I was copied a letter from the mayor of Sachs Harbour to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment outlining the community's concerns about the lack of availability of housing for teachers, and how some government policies have a negative impact on newly hired employees.

It is simple, Mr. Speaker. There is a limited rental market in Sachs Harbour. Newly hired teachers have been forced to double up to share a public housing unit because there is nowhere else for them to go. In addition, when the rent was calculated on the unit last year, they ended up having to pay 50 per cent out of their take-home pay towards their rent, and pay utilities.

Mr. Speaker, this is a 100 per cent increase in rent charged for the same unit just a year ago.

There are also issues of freight allowances for new hires. One of the latest hires had to bring a bed into the community for a bad back. The other had to bring a washer and dryer for their rental accommodations. As you can imagine, this severely impacted the availability of food shipped up at the same time, meaning they were forced to pay the significantly higher costs of buying locally. This needs to be addressed, Mr. Speaker.

The children in the small communities have the right to quality education. We need to create a working and living environment for teachers so they will stay and become a part of the community. If they have to spend all of their wages on keeping a roof over their heads and food in their stomachs, there is no incentive for them to stay, beyond their love of teaching and the joy they get out of seeing the children succeed.

We need to address these issues and move forward in ensuring the success of our children.

**MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
SUPPORT FOR THE PUBLIC SERVICE**

Mr. Abernethy: On several occasions since I was elected, I have gone on record talking about morale in the public service. The staff of the G.N.W.T. are

our most valuable resource. They're the people who provide the essential services to all the residents in the Northwest Territories. Without a happy and motivated public service, we fail in the delivery of these essential services we are expected to deliver as a government.

Now, with this Premier's announcement of \$135 million in reductions over two years, there are waves of terror running through the public service. The continued reference from the Premier to job cuts does nothing but radically reduce already poor morale. It seems to me that focusing on job cuts is exactly the wrong way to pursue a course correction with respect to the government's spending patterns.

Yesterday in the House we heard many suggestions on ways to improve our financial situation without cutting staff — things like reviewing and improving our energy use and consumption within the government itself, eliminating long-term non-essential vacant positions in headquarters where government departments use salary dollars for other purposes, and increasing co-operation between departments in order to reduce duplicate spending.

Once every reasonable effort has been made to reduce our overall spending through streamlining as well as creative and innovative thinking and planning, we may still be faced with some job cuts. These job cuts should be a last resort; they shouldn't be the government's first solution to our financial difficulties.

In 1996 the government made the mistake of implementing short-sighted job cuts with an intent to reduce spending. It failed. It did not result in a fundamental change in how the public service does business, which is what is truly required. In the end, people of the N.W.T. left, which affected the amount of money we received from the federal government. All the structural changes, such as the elimination of personnel and the consolidation of Renewable Resources and Economic Development and Tourism, have reversed themselves at a greater cost to the G.N.W.T.

Let's not re-live the same mistakes. Let's get it right. To this end, I encourage the Premier and his cabinet to engage staff, the public, as well as the 11 Members on this side of the House to find creative solutions which improve our financial situation without cutting public service jobs. We must support our most valuable resource: our dedicated and committed staff. They deserve better than the message they are currently receiving.

Mr. Speaker, later today I'll be asking the Premier questions regarding staff and finding ways to reduce spending without destroying morale. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY CONTROLS
RELATING TO MINE LEASE AGREEMENTS

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, as incredible as it may seem in this day and age, this government still does not have a specific legislative or regulative mechanism for requiring financial security for mining lessors of Commissioner's Land. Has this cost the taxpayer and the environment? You betcha — in spades — and I suspect with more costs to come.

Mr. Speaker, in his Budget Address in February 2006, the Minister of Finance noted that the operating surplus had actually changed to a deficit, due in part to the accrual of a \$23 million liability for the Giant Mine Remediation. As party to an agreement with Canada on this project, the N.W.T. is also committed to a contribution of \$1 million per year to this cleanup for the foreseeable future.

And yet, Mr. Speaker, as owners and land managers, we continue to issue leases to mining companies without any financial security whatsoever. In fact, in June 2002 this government issued a land lease to Miramar Con Mine Ltd., stipulating that a security deposit would be required when the legislation requiring it came into force.

Mr. Speaker, despite the minor change required to enable this condition to be fulfilled, we still do not have the legislation requiring such financial security. Thus, our government and our people remain vulnerable at a time when we clearly cannot afford such exceptional costs.

On January 15 of this year, at a public hearing of the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board for Miramar Con Mine Ltd.'s A-water licence — a meeting where G.N.W.T. chose to not even appear — it became painfully clear that our government has not only insufficient financial security with mine leases, it maintains none whatsoever. This, despite the fact that concerned members of the public have repeatedly raised this issue with the Minister of Finance over a period of years.

Mr. Speaker, this Assembly is supposed to be all about prevention. Well, here is an opportunity for this government to avoid additional financial burdens from downloaded mine cleanups, prevent needless tax burdens for our taxpayers, and prevent further damage to our reputation as land managers, not to mention provide an extra incentive for environmentally sound development. It's not a large task, but it is important and it's overdue. Let's plug this hole and make the legislative change that will give us the ability to require financial security on leases of Commissioner's Land.

There will be questions on this. Mahsi.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
CONDOLENCES TO FAMILIES
OF DECEASED INUVIK RESIDENTS

Mr. McLeod: Since the dissolution of the 15th Legislative Assembly, the community of Inuvik has had a few residents pass on, and I wanted to use my Member's statement today to mention them and to let them know that we share in their loss.

We've lost Kendra Sittichinli, a bright young 18-year-old just a few weeks away from college, taken from us a little too soon.

Martina Malagana, Ken Stair, Willie Steffanson.

We lost John Dillon and his brother Tom Dillon; Sandy Steffanson; Elias Aviugana.

Lily Lipscomb, who believed in me and was a big supporter of mine and always had words of encouragement for me whenever I ran into her.

We lost Maurice Cardinel and Shirley Coady, and just yesterday we were informed that we lost Ed Dillon.

I just wanted to use this opportunity to extend my condolences to their families, and I wanted to let them know — and I'm sure the Members of this Assembly join me — that our thoughts and prayers are with them.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
SPACE UTILIZATION AT
STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Ramsay: Today I'd like to revisit a topic I raised last fall with the former Minister of Health and Social Services, and that is of space utilization at Stanton Territorial Hospital.

After numerous requests to former Ministers, a staffing review and HR plan were going to be developed for Stanton. That work is still in progress, but the early indications would suggest that a lack of work space and delivery of services in cramped spaces is leading to stress in the workplace.

Last year the hospital turned a patient lounge on the surgery ward into office space. Washrooms and patient rooms have also been converted to office space. Just recently I have become aware of plans to turn the patient lounge on Medicine into office space, and if that's not enough, in addition to that, the hospital is also looking at the potential use of the nursery on OBS to be used for office space.

Is nothing sacred in regard to the proliferation of office and administrative staff space in our hospital? What's going to be next? The chapel?

What the department needs to do is come up with a plan to relocate administrative and office space out of the hospital, so that the required and essential

services that patients, families and health care professionals that work there and deserve to have.... They need the necessary space to operate in and can't be crammed into small spaces. This would certainly help our health care professionals who are challenged day in and day out because of the poor planning and poor decision-making by the hospital and by the Department of Health and Social Services.

Our residents deserve the dedicated, well-run health care facility that Stanton can and should be. Stanton Territorial Hospital is the flagship of our health care system, not some glorified office and administrative building that does not contribute to servicing the health care needs of our residents.

It seems that the department is always quick to study and plan without actually making any progress. It has been referred to in the past as the "Department of Perpetual Planning." It's time the department shed that label and took back our hospital for the residents and health care professionals who so desperately want to get our hospital back to being a hospital.

Please, do not turn any more space into offices, especially the nursery. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Item 4, returns to oral questions. Item 5, recognition of visitors in the gallery. Mr. Jacobson.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

Mr. Jacobson: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to welcome my wife, Jenny, and my cousin Mrs. Stephanie Ungman, and Penni Ungman, Tristan and Angel to the House.

Mr. Speaker: Item 6, acknowledgements. Mr. Beaulieu.

Acknowledgements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT 1-16(2) GAIL BEAULIEU — FORT RESOLUTION

Mr. Beaulieu: Today I wish to acknowledge a health care professional in my riding, Gail Beaulieu, Acting Nurse in Charge of the Deninu Ku'e Health Centre in Fort Resolution.

Gail started her nursing career at the Montreal General Hospital School of Nursing. After graduating she attended Dalhousie University and studied public health as well as an outpost nursing program that included midwifery skills, one of the highlights of her education.

She was recruited to work in Fort Resolution in 1975. After a lengthy break to raise three children,

much of which was spent on Taltson River, she returned to work in 1990.

Recently she completed the Primary Health Care Nurse Practitioner Program at Aurora College here in Yellowknife. Fort Resolution is fortunate to have somebody dedicated to helping others, and today I am honoured to acknowledge Gail for her nursing achievements.

Mr. Speaker: Item 7, oral questions. Mr. Hawkins.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 26-16(2) G.N.W.T. SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERS

Mr. Hawkins: Earlier today I brought up the issue of the Volunteer Support Initiative action plan. The issue really is creating volunteers in spirit and morale within the public service.

A lot of public servants belong to many organizations and they volunteer personal time, but sometimes, as these things conflict with work time, we need a system that engenders that volunteer spirit.

What I'm going to ask the Premier is: would he consider looking at creating a volunteer day for the public service so they can help give back to their community? It would build morale and spirit within our public service.

Hon. Floyd Roland: We do value the volunteers who provide much input into a lot of our communities. In fact, that's why we have, through agreements with the unions, a number of initiatives that provide for employees to take part in volunteer initiatives throughout the Territory.

I would have a difficult time looking at that specific issue. We need to look at the whole way we provide and support the volunteer sector, and one of the examples is the through our established civic leave process.

Mr. Hawkins: The federal government established a volunteer day, and it allows employees to go and do personal things and volunteer on initiatives that bring them personal satisfaction. This would help raise the morale, as I've said numerous times already now, within our service. Here we are buckling down very tough on them, but we want to give them something that they enjoy, something that means something special in their lives.

I'd like the Premier to reconsider his statement and see if he would look into the issue and see what work can be done to help facilitate this. Because — don't take this the wrong way — we don't need the union to make this type of decision. This decision could be made at the highest office. It could bring

morale and much needed support throughout our public service.

Hon. Floyd Roland: It's not a matter of the union making a decision for us. It is the discussions we have with the union that represents people who do the work for us and what we require in getting the job done across the territories. We can, ourselves, look at a number of initiatives. We'd have to do a comparison of.... The Member used the example of the federal government — what they offer and what we're offering as well.

Mr. Hawkins: I'm very proud to say I'm Rotarian. I know former Members, such as Mr. Dent, are Rotarians as well, and different people in the public service are. They give time to go to the schools like Weledeh to read to school children every week. The thing is they have to take regular annual leave. That is the type of thing I'd like to see us continue, yet find ways to work with the employees so they are not sacrificing one way to make it work. The fact is, I'd like to see that spirit continue so we can allow employees to do the good things they do in our community — and that's only one example.

Can I get some sort of picture built here as to how confident the Premier is that we could maybe look at something like this or when we could bring something back for a discussion?

Hon. Floyd Roland: We are doing our work on the business plan, and we have highlighted that we want to support the volunteer sector. That would allow for some of the discussion to happen, to see where we may improve on some of our initiatives, as well as recognize that we are one of the most generous jurisdictions when it comes to employees and what we allow for taking time off from work to provide service to the volunteer sector.

QUESTION 27-16(2)
LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY
CONTROLS RELATING TO MINE
LEASE AGREEMENTS

Ms. Bisaro: I wholeheartedly endorse the earlier comments of the Member of Weledeh, and I'd like to follow up on his statement. Consider us a tag team, if you will, at a wrestling match.

This question is addressed to either the Minister of Finance or the Minister of MACA, as they choose.

Considering the huge impact on our environment that abandoned mine sites have and considering the financial impact that mine cleanups have on the government's financial bottom line, why do we not yet have a legislative or regulatory mechanism in place to ensure financial security for the G.N.W.T. in respect to mining and other land leases?

Mr. Speaker: I'd like to remind Members to direct their question to one Minister, and then it will be up to the Executive to decide.

I will go to the Premier, Mr. Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm looking for maybe a bit of clarification on whether it's in the area of securities or a taxation system on leases. For example, on the taxation side of leases outside of municipalities, on Commissioner's Land, we are looking at what we call PATA, and that is the Property Assessment and Taxation Act. We're looking at that for review during the life of this Assembly, to bring it back with potential changes that may be able to incorporate that piece of it.

There are other sections, within our jurisdiction or the federal jurisdiction, that attach costs that have to be set aside in trust funds, for example, for that type of remediation. And yes, we have learned from the past: for example, the Giant Mine, where we have now had to book some liability, along with the federal government, in those areas.

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My apologies for my previous misstep.

The reference is to the Commissioner's Land Act. It's not the Property Assessment and Taxation Act to which we refer.

Mines without financial security are often abandoned, and the cleanup then reverts to either the federal government or the Territorial government. Giant Mine is, unfortunately, an excellent example.

What is required is a small change to the Commissioner's Land Act to require companies that are leasing land from G.N.W.T. to provide financial security. This change can be a huge motivator to industry to respect the environment.

When such a small change can have such a big effect, can the Minister advise when the security will be put in place through an amendment to the act? We have three years, or a little bit more, left in our reign. Let's get it done.

Hon. Floyd Roland: I'm aware that the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs has, in fact, looked at the specific piece and has reviewed a draft, so that work is underway. They would be prepared, once they've come up with a draft, to sit down with Committee at the appropriate time.

Ms. Bisaro: That's extremely good news. I like to hear that.

I would ask the Minister if he could provide us with some kind of timeframe. Are we talking six months,

are we talking a year, are we talking four years, or are we talking the next Assembly?

Hon. Floyd Roland: One of the works we look into, as an overall government, is the legislative agenda, and seeing what, on that agenda, is a list of priorities. The Government House Leader has been pulling that together and shared a version of that with Committee and would seek input as to whether we should continue to pursue certain initiatives or add some of them. It includes timelines.

I'm also aware that a specific piece MACA is working on is dealing with all commercial leases — not just for mining, but all across the Territories.

QUESTION 28-16(2)
G.N.W.T. PUBLIC SERVICE REDUCTIONS

Mr. Krutko: My question is for the Premier. It is in regard to his comments yesterday to Mr. Hawkins. It was an example that he used for vacancies. Through that exercise we would become aware of vacancies which are out there, but it would also be an easy way to look at the direct impact on individuals.

We also have to realize that there is a direct impact on communities that have these vacant positions and haven't been able to have the basic programs and services delivered in their communities. I hope what I heard from the Premier is not that we're going to add more pain to the communities by way of not allowing them to have basic programs and services by way of mental health workers, alcohol and drug workers, income support workers — you name it. A lot of our communities don't even have the basic programs.

I would like to ask the Premier to make it clear to the public that they are not going to be cutting essential services to communities where there are none, where we're trying to fill vacant positions.

Hon. Floyd Roland: One of the things we're operating by as the 16th Legislative Assembly, and the work we're doing around the financial aspects and looking for reinvestments and savings, is we align with the goals we've set. One of our goals is sustainable, vibrant, safe communities. What we would look at in general is.... Vacant positions would be an easier process, but we still have to go back and align with the initiatives we're trying to establish as the 16th Assembly. When we focus on those initiatives, if there are vacant positions that align themselves with that and help us deliver those programs, they wouldn't just be an automatic pull-off-the-shelf.

There are a number of activities we can align ourselves with, whether it is vacant positions that don't align with our priorities that we've had a difficult time fulfilling, as well as, for example,

retirements that are occurring. We could time this, as well, in a whole number of ways, and we're looking for how we would do that.

Mr. Krutko: In light of the area where I believe we do have to cut, I also recall that coming into the 13th Assembly, we had some 4,500 employees in the Government of the Northwest Territories, which included Nunavut. Now we have almost 6,000 employees in the Government of the Northwest Territories, which is almost double the number of people in the public service, yet there are 3,000 employees here in Yellowknife.

I would just like to make it clear to the Premier that we are still suffering in the communities because of what happened in the 13th Assembly. We've never been able to catch up with the number of vacancies and the challenges we face. We are having to hire nurses from down south to come in and work shift work, costing us double the cost of trying to put people in communities.

I'd like to ask Premier again that if any cuts take place, they do take place where the growth has happened and not in communities.

Hon. Floyd Roland: As I've stated earlier, this is going to be a broad approach. We're looking at all departments. The larger your budget is, the larger portion will be looked at just for the fact that that's where the budget is. We are going through an exercise that will look at the strategic initiatives that we've set as the 16th Legislative Assembly. We're going to look for opportunities to re-profile, to make better use of the dollars we do spend. We're going to have to live within the financial cap we have with a billion-dollar expenditure.

As the Member pointed out.... He mentioned 6,000, but when you look at permanent employees or casual employees, we're around 5,400 employees within the G.N.W.T. Those are areas from the program-delivery side that we'll have to look at. We're going to come out with a balanced approach that Members will look at and will be able to work with us on if we're heading down the right path or not.

Mr. Krutko: I'd like to ask the Premier if there have been commitments made by Ministers to particular communities on issues. I was with the Minister of Health in Tsiigehtchic. They're trying to get a nurse as the community hasn't had one for four years, and they're also looking at a mental health physician for that community.

I'd like to get some assurance from the Premier that if there are any commitments made by Ministers to communities, to try to ensure they fill those vacant positions, that they don't come back now and say, "Sorry, we're not committed to that." I'd like to get some assurance that those commitments will be lived up to.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, again, as we begin laying out the plan we have for the 16th Assembly, targeting areas where we want reinvestment, areas that we want to re-prioritize, those activities will occur. Ministers who make commitments need to align their commitments with that plan. I would say if Ministers are making commitments that don't fit with that plan, they're going to have to justify to this House and Members why that commitment was made and not honoured.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Premier if he has a system in place to notify affected MLAs if there are going to be any vacancies in their ridings by way of positions. Then we can be informed ahead of time, and we will be able to react to our constituents when they find out there are notices given or that positions are going to be removed from our constituencies.

Hon. Floyd Roland: We're going to work in a way that is respectful for Members as well as for employees when we do make decisions on what positions may be affected. We're going to work in that environment, where we're working in a transparent forum. We definitely don't want Members to walk back to their communities when a decision has been made and you're approached by people who you're not aware have been affected. We are going to try to do business differently. Even with that, we're coming back to this House, to Members, for input, so you'll be aware of the changes that are going to take place.

QUESTION 29-16(2)
DEH CHO BRIDGE PROJECT

Mrs. Groenewegen: Mr. Speaker, I'm getting really tired of talking about the Deh Cho Bridge. I think the Premier is probably getting tired of talking about it too. So I'm going to start asking my questions of the Auditor General, instead of him.

But just one more set of questions for him, first.

Laughter.

Mr. Speaker, does the Premier support and will his cabinet co-operate with a whole disclosure to the Auditor General of Canada of the correspondence and documents related to the Deh Cho Bridge project for an independent review?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, we are co-operating with the Office of the Auditor General. This issue came up as a result of the review of our public accounts, which happens normally between January and February. This loan guarantee was asked about, and they've asked us different questions. We've been working to provide additional information, and we'll work co-operatively with her office.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Mr. Speaker, since that information won't be received and reviewed and dealt with overnight and there's going to be some time lapse here, I'd like to ask the Premier: are there any other significant dates and milestones related to our government's participation in the Deh Cho Bridge project that are still yet to come and that we should know about?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, the significant time frames for our government have come to pass in the sense of the extension that was granted through the banking institution on the loan guarantee, as well as the lending of the dollars for the bridge corporation. The one aspect is, as we are informed, the lawyers are doing their work to dot the i's and cross the t's. If it were to come back to this table and require any change, then that's when it would come back to our table.

Mrs. Groenewegen: If any deficiencies are identified by the legal review and the dotting the i's and crossing the t's, as the Premier has said, and any decision comes back to our government, could the Premier share with us what his reaction would be, at that time, to a request for an extension or any other kind of concession regarding this project on behalf of our government?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, we're entering the area of "what if something happened." My position, as I put out to Members, is that with any changes to what we are involved with — for example, the requirement for an extensive loan guarantee, a change to a concession agreement — I would come back to Members and seek their input prior to making that decision. I stand by that commitment.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Back to my question about any significant dates or milestones. Is there a time frame around that final scrutiny of that legal document? Is there a date by which it won't go any further?

Hon. Floyd Roland: We've been informed by the parties that the lawyers require until the third week of February — February 22, in and around that time frame — to sign off the final document. And again, if there are no changes that affect our side of the equation, it's a go. The only reason it would come back is if they try to renegotiate a portion of that. Then it would come back to our table. If they go ahead and sign the deal, as do the banks and the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation, the process is underway.

QUESTION 30-16(2)
G.N.W.T. PUBLIC SERVICE REDUCTIONS

Mr. Abernethy: In my Member's statement I talked about morale and the \$135 million in budget reductions. Since the announcement has come out

from the Premier that there will be \$135 million in reductions and staff cuts, we have all had staff come to us and ask us, "Is my job going to be gone tomorrow? Do I need to start looking for another job?" As indicated in my statement, I think cutting jobs is the last thing we should be doing. It should be the last course of action with respect to bringing our spending in line.

I'd like to ask the Premier to commit to work with staff and to assure them that if any job cuts do occur, they will be as a last resort, and that we as the government will make every reasonable effort to reduce our spending without cutting jobs.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, I ask one thing for the record. In his Member's statement the Member referenced the fact that we would be making cuts on the backs of employees. That is not the process we are using. The target isn't whether we are going to take out a certain number or percentage of employees. It's just a matter of process.

The target we're working with is looking at the programs we deliver and whether they are providing or delivering what they were identified to be delivering, or what they were structured to deliver — looking at those programs and reprioritizing that money or using it in other areas or initiatives.

There are a number of factors that would end up being in process. We would work with the frameworks that we have in place — for example, transfer assignments for moving employees over to where they may fit with a reorganized unit. There are a number of factors we would put in place before an employee is left to the last resort where that position can't be redeployed some place, or even in another community.

But for the record, this exercise is not about just taking a target percentage of employees and removing them. We're looking at a program-based approach, and unfortunately there will be some effect to employees where programs are being relocated or reprioritized.

Mr. Abernethy: I'm glad to hear that. I'd still like to hear that job cuts will be a last resort and that this government will make every reasonable effort to find creative ways of reducing our spending — such as items mentioned yesterday about energy efficiency and those types of things — before job cuts.

On October 17 I asked the Premier "How will he work toward strengthening the public service and improving the morale of staff within the G.N.W.T.?" According to the unedited *Hansard* from October 17, the Premier indicated that "we must treat all employees — it doesn't matter at what level — with respect as an individual." He went further to say:

"We need to talk to those at the front line to say what works for you in how you deliver your programs."

Directly related to that, I'd like to see a commitment from the Premier to actually work with staff, get out to the staff and talk to the staff at the lower levels. They often have a lot of good ideas on how to reduce spending and streamline programs that would be a lot more effective and may not be presented to you at the higher levels.

I would like you, as Premier, to commit to getting out — not necessarily you — or getting your department out and talk to the staff and listen to the staff. They have a lot of good ideas; they're the ones who deliver the programs. If you get to them and you get the information from them, they might be able to help you streamline and reduce costs without cutting their own jobs.

So a commitment from the Premier.

Hon. Floyd Roland: What was raised yesterday was about trying to look at other ways we can do that. The Member is correct: I myself would not be able to touch base with all of my employees, but I would pursue that through our departments. We need to seek those that are directly involved.

I recall even from my own days as a public servant in the Government of the N.W.T. that you see things at a community level that you know can be addressed, and there can be some savings identified. We should not turn a blind eye to those that are on the front-line and who might have some ideas for us. We'll look at ways of trying to do that. I gave an example yesterday — a potential way of getting ideas on the Premier's web site. We can look at a number of other ways of doing that as well.

QUESTION 31-16(2)
SPACE UTILIZATION AT
STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Health and Social Services.

It's not a new issue; it's one that was raised during the length of the last government. It has to do with space utilization at Stanton Territorial Hospital.

As I mentioned in my statement, morale has been an issue. There's been an HR plan that's in the works. There have also been some questionnaires that have gone out to employees. One of the main themes that has come back is space utilization and the fact that health care professionals at the hospital are having to deliver services to patients in cramped and often inadequate space. I'm wondering why, if this is the case, does the hospital insist on turning patient lounges into office space? I'm wondering if the Minister could provide an

answer to why that is the case today — that they're looking at turning more space at that hospital into office space.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for the question.

There is no question that Stanton Territorial Hospital is under a lot of pressure with respect to capital needs. It's a 25-year-old building, and there has not been a lot of work done in that regard. Space has been an issue. Like all other capital funding processes, work is underway to review those needs and to try to meet those needs. There are not a lot of studies going on, but there is work in place to look at seven of the most critical areas, those being emergency, medical day care units, ICU, the diagnostic imaging place.... There's a lot of work that needs to be done to do that, and the hospital is using its resources as best it can until any major changes are done.

Mr. Ramsay: My point is that the hospital is in fact a hospital — it is not an office building; it is not an administrative building; it is a hospital — and it should be used as such. I find when the hospital and its departments make decisions to turn patient lounges — and, I've heard recently, the nursery — into office space, that causes me a great deal of concern, Mr. Speaker. The administrative staff should be relocated out of that hospital so the hospital can in fact be a hospital.

I'd like to again ask the Minister what plans she has, and the department has, to address this, so we can take a look at getting the administrative office staff out of that hospital, so that the health care professionals that work in that hospital and the patients who need it have the required space to conduct the work that's needed there.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, the Member is aware, as well as all of us, that the option of moving the admin office staff out of there has to be part of the capital plan. All of us work together on our capital needs and where that money should go.

It is true that the facility is about 25 years old, and it has not gone through mid-life retrofit. But it is in line with all the other facilities that are looking for attention.

I could advise the Member that we will be look at the possibility of moving the administration office out of there as part of the plan for looking at the seven critical areas. That would be discussed in the upcoming capital plan process.

You have to look at all of the programs and services and recognize the fact that the hospital is being used in a very different way than it was meant to be a long time ago when it was built. It was supposed to be an acute-care facility, but it has turned into doing lots of other things it was never

meant to do, and the space has not caught up with that. That is part of the process, and I expect to have some of that work included in the next business plan session and capital plan session.

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, I know the capital planning process — I believe it was \$27 million that was earmarked for Stanton over the next few years — is one issue. The issue I'm getting to is that if you have a morale problem and you have an issue there with not enough space to conduct the services that our residents require, why would you exacerbate the situation by continuing to make decisions that turn patient lounges — and now, it looks like, the nursery — into office space? It pokes a red hot poker right into the eye of the health care professionals who work at Stanton when the departments make decisions like that. I think the public deserves better, and the health care professionals who work at that hospital deserve better.

I'm going to ask the Minister: is the decision to turn the nursery into office space a done deal? Is that going to happen?

Hon. Sandy Lee: It's their authority as to who is responsible for making their internal decisions about how to use their space in the most practical way possible with the resources they have. A means of doing anything larger than that, such as moving administrative offices out of there or reorganizing their work and units, would include planning on the part of this Assembly. The department is reviewing the space used there as a part of a human resource review plan that is being worked on.

I am aware of the fact that the space issue and the work safety issue were identified as some of the major issues. I look forward to reading to the Members, in the next business planning cycle — which is the proper way for us to do it — to see what options we have available, including the possibility of finding other spaces for administrative offices if we can't do anything else.

Mr. Ramsay: I'm just having a bit of trouble understanding how the department and the hospital could make decisions where money is going need to be spent on renovating a patient lounge, the nursery and washrooms into office space. I think that money could be better spent taking the office administrative staff that are in the hospital and putting them in another space, perhaps downtown in other office buildings around Yellowknife. They don't need to be in the hospital, Mr. Speaker. That's the type of work I want the Minister to commit to today.

Hon. Sandy Lee: I don't disagree with the Member with respect to the best use of the hospital. I'm trying to remind the Member that the resources that

we put into all health care authorities, including their facilities, are decisions of this Assembly. It is my job to come up with the options and make sure that we have the right information for the Members to consider. I'm telling the Member again that this will be part of our discussion. Members know also that this is our first chance to make those kinds of decisions in the upcoming review process.

QUESTION 32-16(2)
DEH CHO BRIDGE PROJECT

Mr. Bromley: A point of clarification. At this time, in his position as Premier and Minister of Finance, is the Premier aware of any mechanisms we could use to put the Deh Cho Bridge before this House for a go—no go vote?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, the fact is the will of this House trumps my initiatives or cabinet's initiatives or even initiatives of past government. There is an avenue that is always available to this House. The Deh Cho Bridge project is on the books, and Members can decide if there is continued support for that. We would have to have a debate about the risks of doing that at this time.

The other avenue, which Mrs. Groenewegen asked about earlier, is if, through the final work that is happening on signing off through the lawyers, they were to come back and request any changes through the concession agreement or what would be required through the FMB, that could bring it back to this floor. Then we'd have that discussion as well. Thank you.

QUESTION 33-16(2)
SPACE UTILIZATION AT
STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Ramsay: Again I want to continue with some questions to the Minister of Health and Social Services. I didn't get an answer to the question of whether, in fact, the nursery on OBS at Stanton Territorial Hospital will be turned into office space.

Hon. Sandy Lee: I can categorically advise the Member that the nursery at the hospital is not turning into office space.

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister about the patient lounge on the medicine ward at Stanton Territorial Hospital. Will that, in fact, be turned into office space?

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that information, and I'll be happy to get back to the Member regarding that, but I am not aware of that unit being turned into an office.

QUESTION 34-16(2)
DEH CHO BRIDGE PROJECT

Mrs. Groenewegen: I am really glad that I didn't say the last sentence that was at the end of my questions about the Deh Cho Bridge project, because we have a few minutes, here.

The Premier raises the issue of liability. This issue did come up before. I wanted to get a sense of what kind of opinion had been sought on liability. I think we got to the point that no real legal opinion had been obtained. I reread *Hansard*, and it sounded like what the Premier was saying was that in his opinion, we would have extensive liability. And you know, although I really respect his opinion, I don't respect it in regard to legal matters, maybe, in quite the same way.

I would ask the Premier: does the G.N.W.T. have in their possession any legal opinion which would speculate on this government's liability if we did anything which could cause the Deh Cho Bridge project not to proceed?"

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, we have not asked for an opinion in that area. I would again, looking at the file and seeing where we are at... We made an assumption. Looking at the contract, a concession agreement has been agreed to and the builder has been offered a guaranteed price. If we were to back out now, in my opinion — I shouldn't offer that, I guess, as I am not a lawyer, thankfully; stick to the business I do know — we would be challenged. We'd have to look at that.

Mrs. Groenewegen: The Premier refers to a contract that has been signed with a contractor to build the Deh Cho Bridge. That contract is not with the Government of the Northwest Territories, to my knowledge. That contract is with the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation. It seems like we use the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation and our government interchangeably when it is convenient. If we want information, it is the Deh Cho Bridge project that we hide behind. But when we talk about liability, it is the government. Who is the contract with? Is it with the Government of the Northwest Territories or the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation? Who would incur the liability?

Hon. Floyd Roland: The fact is the liability issue for us isn't directly tied to the contract. The contract was a guaranteed price. That work has been done through the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation, with the builder of the bridge.

Our piece, our liability, is tied to the concession agreement, and if we were to affect that with our own decisions outside of their process or what work they were doing, that's the reference I would be making to it.

Mrs. Groenewegen: When we talk about significant dates, obviously September 28 is a significant date, because somebody signed a concession agreement on behalf of this government on September 28. October 1 was a significant date. That was Election Day.

January 31 was another significant date. What happened on January 31? That was only a week and a half ago. We passed another date of some sort. I'd like the Premier to explain: What was the significance of January 31?

Hon. Floyd Roland: The January 31 date is a date where it would have been a go-no go on the concession agreement if the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation hadn't met the requirements. They informed us by letters, and showing letters from the bank that holds the.... We would, for example, have to initiate the loan guarantee on our part. They have provided letters from their lenders that the money will flow after the lawyers dot the i's and cross the t's.

For our piece, the January 31 date was for meeting the requirements in the concession agreement — that is, their equity portion — and having the lenders signed on, on this.

Mrs. Groenewegen: It doesn't sound like January 31 was the go-no go date, simply because, in fact, there was another three-week extension after that to clarify the legal documents around that date.

It's curious to me that that was such a go-no go, as the Premier described it. That was a go-no go date, January 31, but "take another three weeks."

Who's got the liability here? We have the liability here. If it's a no go, our \$9 million loan guarantee gets called, and the government steps up for \$9 million. I don't see any liability on the other side.

I want the Premier to describe to us that February 22 date, prior to that. If this government... That's an "if" question. I have to think of a question that's not hypothetical. Thank you.

QUESTION 35-16(2)
TAXATION AS A REVENUE OPTION

Mr. Krutko: From everything that's been said and what we're hearing in the media, I'd just like to ask the Premier: it seems like we're focussing on trying to reduce our costs, but is there any way we're trying to increase our revenues by looking at areas such as taxation?

We had a debate in the 13th Assembly on developing such a thing as a resource tax, and I believe if we'd put the tax in place then, we probably wouldn't have the financial problems we're facing today. With the reductions that we're looking at now, we're looking at the possibility of future

generations and ensuring that we're able to sustain programs and services for future years.

I'd like to ask the Premier if he has considered looking at the options by way of tax revenues as a means of being able to offset some of this debt by bringing in new revenues by taxation.

Hon. Floyd Roland: The appetite for revenue for expenditure purposes is almost unquenchable by this government. We've just looked at — and we can show examples from past governments — a corporate tax adjustment of \$50 million that got swallowed up by the system. The problem is, those are short-term, so that is something we have to look at.

The Member has talked about "sustainable." As a government we have to be able to provide a sustainable level of service to the people across the Territories, so that is one of the exercises we're going through.

The other side of it is to ensure that we have revenues enough to keep the programs going. We are looking at revenue options. We're looking at existing revenue options as well as looking at those that would require new acts that would have to be approved by this Assembly. So we are looking at the options that are available to us.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, I believe we do have to take a close look at this. If you look at the profits of these mega-companies such as Exxon Mobil, which announced a \$40 billion profit, and you look at the diamond companies, which are making billions of dollars of profits a year, they're taking diamonds and oil and gas out of the Northwest Territories but not leaving anything behind to the real residents who should be benefitting from those resources.

I think, as a government, we have to seriously take these industries up on this matter. I know, Mr. Speaker, during the argument for the pipeline, we had to reach some concessions to not raise royalties, to not raise taxes for the pipeline from Imperial Oil — which is a subsidiary of Exxon Mobil and which made \$40 billion.

I'd just like to ask the Premier if he'd like the government to seriously look at this alternative. Bring it back as an option that we can look at to maybe consider a way of increasing our resource base for revenues by looking at the resource sector, which has the ability to act right now.

Hon. Floyd Roland: I believe I said that as a government, we are looking at our tax options — those that we have on the books as well as those that would require a legislative initiative if brought back to this Assembly.

As we know from past practice, when governments make adjustments, even adjustments with existing

legislation, it can have a lag time of at least a year to two years before you actually start to see the net results of any change — in some cases, sooner.

For example, one of the avenues my past government practised was to raise the corporate tax. It didn't take very long for corporations — and even our aboriginal corporations — to look at their net impact and decide that they'll put their money in other areas outside of our Territory, which has almost an immediate impact on lost revenue in the Territories. So we have to work out that balance.

But yes, as I stated, we're looking at new initiatives to bring this back to this table for input.

Mr. Krutko: So, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Premier if maybe he could bring forward the legislation that was drafted, I believe, in the 13th Assembly. I don't recall the tax, but there was legislation put forth, developed, that was ready to come forward — by way of looking at this alternative in the 13th Assembly.

So I'd like to ask the Premier: would you consider bringing that back to the table and allowing the Members of this House to take a look at that as an option?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, as we develop our overall plan for the Government of the Northwest Territories, we'll need to, as I've committed, go back to the Members with our options for the savings we need, the re-profiling that we want to do, the reinvesting we want to do in priority areas as well as some of our capital in our communities and the revenue options that we have identified. That's all got to come back to Members. And we'll share that as we put our plan together. Thank you.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, I think as a legacy of this Legislature and of the Premier, we can even name it the "Roland Tax Bill."

Laughter.

Mr. Speaker: I didn't hear a question there.

QUESTION 36-16(2) REVIEW OF BOARDS AND AGENCIES

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, when we talk about these difficult times where we have to go back to considering reductions and strategies for that, a couple of pieces of work were left unfinished, I would like to say, in the 15th Assembly. On the boards and agency review, which looked at strategically refocusing on how we do business, I'd like to know from the Premier — this is one suggestion I'm going to put out today; I'm going to give another one in the next question — would you revive this initiative and take a serious look at it? If our boards and agencies are costing us a lot of

money and not providing a lot for services and programs, would he consider that as part of this reduction strategy?

Hon. Floyd Roland: One of the initiatives was looking at refocusing government — lead Minister was Mr. Miltenberger in that area. That is already a part of the equation to be reviewed.

Mr. Hawkins: Thank you, Premier. To continue along the theme of my suggestions and to make sure they're included.... I got a phone call today from a constituent on two separate but similar matters, so I'll put them both in the same question.

Mr. Speaker, some of the cost reduction ideas — and I'm glad to hear boards and agencies will be part of this — are negotiated contracts. Negotiated contracts, they're convinced — and I think they're right — cost us more than public tenders.

The other thing is allowing employees to use flexibility when they do things like make travel plans. For example, we tell them that they have to go travel one certain way, but we don't allow them to find the cheapest option. And now in fiscally restrained times, we are telling them to buckle down and show initiative. Well, if we can find ways to do business cheaper, are we going to create that type of flexibility by both stopping negotiated contracts and allowing employees to find cheaper ways to do business?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, one of the other areas we have initiated in this government is the infrastructure committee, which will look at how we deliver infrastructure: the timing, the processes, negotiated contracts. There's a policy overall, government-wide, that is used by departments. We would have to do, in a sense, a case-by-case analysis to see if in fact there was a savings. The other fact of that is, when we talk about sustainable community, it is a way of initiating economic development in our smaller communities. So that's a balance we have to look at as well.

Mr. Hawkins: I was just going to call it quits until the Premier mentioned one thing, which was "if there was a savings."

Mr. Speaker, I have to say that when you have an RFP — a request for proposal; that is, you request a proposal for a contract tender, and you get a comparison dollar figure on a product, and hopefully it's the same kind of product they're offering when it goes out to bid.... But when you do a negotiated contract, you have nothing to compare it to. You just sort of go in and say, "What's the best price?" And then, "Can we live with it in our budget?"

Mr. Speaker, would the Premier initiate a process that reviews the situation of negotiating contracts and ensures that we stop it in sort of market-style

communities? I'm not suggesting that in little, tiny, small communities we don't consider the negotiated process; I'm saying in large market communities such as Yellowknife, Inuvik, Fort Smith, Hay River and even Simpson. Those types of places are large enough that they have a real economy.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, I think it is a process we'll have to look at. Right now, for example, any negotiated contract that is left, we require the department to report back on the benefits and the costing. We have looked at the fact that some of those contracts have come back at a lower cost than we would have achieved had we gone out to the public tender process. There are times when we look at it, after looking at the economic benefit.... We have to look at some of the initiatives that are underway. For example, we have two MOUs now signed in the Territory that talk about providing benefits to aboriginal organizations. So that is something that we have to take into consideration as we review this area.

Mr. Hawkins: The Premier brings up a good point about the benefits. But I got a call quite some time ago — not recently — from a company that does business in the North, and the majority, the lion's share, of business that they've sort of worked through in their contract has gone south. So what they've done is set up a bit of a phantom company, so they can get a Northern image, working with aboriginal organizations. So they give a piece, but we don't see what is really underneath the name.

If we're going to do this process, and if you're reviewing and you're standing there and saying that we did a negotiated contract so this community got the benefits of that, I want to make sure we're looking to where the benefits really went. Will you do that, Mr. Premier?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, the ownership structures are reviewed as part of the process. A benefit analysis for that community or region is looked at as well. The whole area of negotiated contracts is up for discussion. And yes, the intention, when you look at the negotiated contracts policy, is to build an economic factor within the smaller communities. They can then move into the free market situation where there is competition among people and companies in that sense.

Mr. Speaker: Item 8, written questions. Mr. McLeod.

Written Questions

QUESTION 3-16(2) CLIENT ACCESS TO HOUSING PROGRAMS

Mr. McLeod: I would like to pose my written question to the Minister of Housing.

- 1) What is the number of Inuvik clients approved for housing programs?
- 2) What is the client-by-client breakdown?
- 3) What is the amount of money received per client? and
- 4) What was the nature of the program and the money that was approved for it?

QUESTION 4-16(2) DEH CHO BRIDGE CONCESSION AGREEMENT

Mr. Ramsay: Two written questions:

- 1) Did the G.N.W.T. have the updated cost-benefit analysis prior to the signing of the concession agreement of the Deh Cho Bridge project on September 28, 2007?
- 2) What economic analysis did the G.N.W.T. and the Department of Transportation have at their disposal to make these decisions to proceed with the signing of the concession agreement on the Deh Cho Bridge project, and if so, who did that economic analysis?

QUESTION 5-16(2) CONTRACTS AND SERVICES FROM SOUTHERN VENDORS

Mr. Bromley: My questions are for the Minister of Public Works and Services.

- 1) What contracted services does G.N.W.T. have with southern vendors?
- 2) What are the costs of these G.N.W.T. contracted services with southern vendors?
- 3) How many jobs are associated with the G.N.W.T. contracted services from southern vendors?

Mr. Speaker: Item 9, returns to written questions. Item 10, replies to opening address. Item 11, petitions. Item 12, reports of standing and special committees. Item 13, reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 14, tabling of documents.

Tabling of Documents

Mr. Speaker: I wish to table the official voting results of the general election of the 16th Legislative Assembly held on October 1, 2007. The official voting results are published in accordance with section 265(1) and (2) of the Elections and Plebiscites Act.

Document 6-16(2), Election of the 16th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories, Official Voting Results, tabled.

Also pursuant to section 5 of the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, I wish to table the summary of Members' absences for the period November 27, 2007 to February 5, 2008.

Document 7-16(2), Summary of Members' Absences for the Period November 27, 2007, to February 5, 2008, tabled.

Also I wish to table the report of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner regarding the finding of the Private Disclosure Statements of Mr. Jackie Jacobson, Member of Nunakput, pursuant to section 99(2) of the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act.

Document 8-16(2), Report of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner — Filing of Private Disclosure Statement, Mr. Jackie Jacobson, MLA Nunakput, tabled.

Also I wish to table the report of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner regarding the finding of the Private Disclosure Statements of Mr. Robert C. McLeod, Member of Inuvik Twin Lakes, pursuant to section 99(2) of the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act.

Document 9-16(2), Report of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner — Filing of Private Disclosure Statement, Mr. Robert C. McLeod, MLA Inuvik Twin Lakes, tabled.

Mr. Speaker: Item 15, notices of motion. Ms. Bisaro.

Notices of Motion

MOTION 1-16(2) REVIEW OF THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

Ms. Bisaro: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Monday, February, 11, 2008, I will move the following motion.

I move, seconded by the Hon. Member for Thebacha, that the 16th Legislative Assembly refers the review of the provisions and operation of the Official Languages Act required by section 35 of that act, to the Standing Committee on Government Operations, and further that the terms of reference for the review of the provisions and operations of the Official Languages Act by the Standing Committee on Government Operations be established as follows:

- 1) The Standing Committee on Government Operations, in undertaking a review of the Official Languages Act, shall examine:
 - a) The administration and implementation of the act, including regulations, policies and procedures established by the G.N.W.T.

- b) The achievements of the objectives stated in the preamble of the act.
- c) The effectiveness of the provisions of the act and, in particular, the extent to which they are contributing to the objectives stated in the preamble.
- d) The roles and responsibilities of the Minister, the Official Languages Board, the Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board, and the Languages Commissioner, and the extent which those roles and responsibilities have been fulfilled and are contributing to the objectives.
- e) The Standing Committee on Government Operations shall have access to such persons, papers and records as necessary for the conduct of this review.
- f) The Minister, Languages Commissioner, Official Languages Board and Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board shall provide all reasonable assistance to the Standing Committee on Government Operations as required by the Act.
- g) The Standing Committee on Government Operations shall be provided through appropriations of the Legislative Assembly with adequate funds to carry out responsibility.
- h) The Standing Committee on Government Operations shall be provided by the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories with the necessary administrative and professional support to carry out its terms of reference and assigned responsibilities as they associate with this review.
- i) The Standing Committee on Government Operations may make recommendations for amendments to the act that it considers desirable through a final report.
- j) The Standing Committee on Government Operations may table this report, which may be an interim report, during the life of the second session and a final report no later than February 2009.

Mr. Speaker: Item 16, notices of motion for the first reading of bills. Item 17, motions. Item 18, first reading of bills.

First Reading of Bills

BILL 3
AN ACT TO AMEND
THE EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS ACT

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Hon. Member for Range Lake, that Bill 3, An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act, be read for the first time. Mahsi.

Mr. Speaker: Bill 3 has had first reading.

Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time.

Mr. Speaker: Item 19, second reading of bills. Item 20, consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters. Item 21, report of Committee of the Whole. Item 22, third reading of bills. Item 22, Orders of the Day. Mr. Clerk.

Clerk of the House (Mr. Mercer): Mr. Speaker there will be a meeting of the Priorities and Planning Committee in Committee Room A at the rise of the House today.

Orders of the Day

Orders of the Day for Monday, February 11, 2008, 1:30 p.m.

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Ministers' Statements
- 3) Members' Statements
- 4) Returns to Oral Questions
- 5) Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
- 6) Acknowledgements
- 7) Oral Questions
- 8) Written Questions

- 9) Returns to Written Questions
- 10) Replies to Opening Address
- 11) Petitions
- 12) Reports of Standing and Special Committees
- 13) Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
- 14) Tabling of Documents
- 15) Notices of Motion
- 16) Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
- 17) Motions

Motion 1-16(2): Review of the Official Languages Act (Bisaro)

- 18) First Reading of Bills

Bill 1: Interim Appropriation Act, 2008-2009

Bill 2: Supplementary Appropriation Act, No. 3, 2007-2008

- 19) Second Reading of Bills

Bill 3: An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act

- 20) Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and other Matters

MS 1-16(2): Sessional Statement

- 21) Report of Committee of the Whole
- 22) Third Reading of Bills
- 23) Orders of the Day

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until Monday, February 11, 2008, at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

