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The Honourable Paul Delorey, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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**Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
Tuesday, May 27, 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, Mr. Menicoche, Hon. Michael Miltenberger, Mr. Ramsay, Hon. Floyd Roland, Hon. Norman Yakeleya.

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayer

Prayer.

Speaker (Hon. Paul Delorey): Good afternoon, colleagues. Welcome back to the Chamber. Item 2, Ministers' statements, the honourable Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Lafferty.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 34-16(2)
TEACHER EDUCATION GRADUATION
AT THEBACHA CAMPUS

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to announce that the first class of Aurora College graduates to have completed their Bachelor of Education degree in the Northwest Territories held their convocation in Fort Smith on April 27, 2008. The class included 15 graduates. Thirteen are from the Northwest Territories communities of Deline, Fort Good Hope, Fort Simpson, Fort Smith and Yellowknife. Two graduates are from outside of the NWT, from Fort Chipewyan in Alberta and Richibucto Village, New Brunswick. I congratulate all of the graduates and welcome them into the workforce. I learned that many of these graduates will be returning or beginning to work in schools across the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, ensuring we have a representative workforce in our schools isn't just about providing jobs for people in the communities. It also makes it possible for Northerners to become role models for NWT students, opening more doors for them. We want our young aboriginal students to pursue skilled professions and trades, so it is important for them to see people from their own communities succeeding in such jobs that currently exist in their communities. What is more, research shows that culture-based education that reflects and respects the students' heritage, language and life experience enhances that students' self-esteem and therefore greatly improves educational outcomes. We know how important it is to invest in the quality of our

training so that Northerners are ready and able to get jobs. The extension of the Bachelor of Education program to full completion at Aurora College is one great example of how quality training in the Northwest Territories can lead to employment for Northerners in the North.

The Teacher Education Program has existed as a partnership between Aurora College, the University of Saskatchewan through the Indian Teacher Education Program, and the Government of the Northwest Territories for over 30 years. By working together we have made it possible for Northerners to gain a Bachelor of Education without leaving their homes and relocating to the south. This was just an example of more degree programs to come to the North.

The department will continue to work with our partners to find new ways and even better means of providing such opportunity. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
SPEECH, LANGUAGE,
AND HEARING DISORDERS

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May is Speech and Hearing Awareness Month, and today I'd like to highlight communication disorders.

The ability to communicate is our most human characteristic. Speaking, understanding and hearing are essential skills in our society, but most of us take communication for granted. Tens of thousands of people are afflicted with a communication disorder which is defined as a speech, language or hearing disorder which affects an individual's ability to communicate. Together, speech, language and hearing disorders comprise the largest group of handicapped individuals in Canada.

Some facts to consider. One in 10 Canadians suffers from some type of communication disorder. That means two of us in this room. The first four

years of life are critical for speech and language development. It's estimated that 4 per cent of preschoolers have a significant speech or language disorder. A child should use 200 or more words by the time they're two or three, and by the age of four and a half their vocabulary should consist of approximately 2,000 words. By age six a child with normal language skills has a vocabulary of 14,000 words. A high school student has a vocabulary of 80,000 words, and an adult has a vocabulary of 80,000 to 250,000 words. We acquire about 5,000 new words a year.

Communication disorders in school-aged children are often misdiagnosed as learning disabilities or behavioural problems, and those disorders can be very difficult to treat later on. Added to that is the fact that children with behavioural problems are ten times more likely than other children to have language disorders.

Both the incidence and the prevalence of hearing loss increase with age — unfortunately for me. The onset of adult hearing loss can start as early as the third or fourth decade of life. That's all of us, you guys. Twenty per cent of those over the age of 65 and 40 per cent of those over 75 have a significant communication disorder. Six to 12 per cent of seniors and 80 per cent of nursing home residents experience speech, language or voice difficulties. Hearing loss is the third most prevalent chronic disability among older adults, following arthritis and hypertension.

These facts seem rather depressing, but early identification and rehabilitation of speech and hearing disorders is not only possible but can also prevent communication difficulties in school, on the job and in social situations.

Mr. Speaker, I request unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

Unanimous consent granted.

Ms. Bisaro: Early detection is vital and no one is too young to test, even newborns. Speech language pathologists and audiologists are specialists in diagnosis and treatment of communication disorders. Luckily, we have such specialists in the North, and if you suspect someone has a communication disorder, take them to be tested. Diagnosis and treatment will only improve their quality of life, no matter what their age.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON DIAMOND INDUSTRY IMPACT ON TU NEDHE COMMUNITIES

Mr. Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to talk about how the diamond industry has impacted the Tu Nedhe communities. I'm not sure if everyone

knows, but the BHP, Diavik and De Beers diamond mines are within the Tu Nedhe riding.

October of this year will mark the tenth year that BHP has been operating, and this past January Diavik Diamond Mine has been in operation for five years. This month it will be four years that De Beers' Snap Lake project has been operating.

The diamond mine presence has both positive and negative impacts for Tu Nedhe. Economically the diamond industries have increased employment opportunities for many residents living in Tu Nedhe. They have also marginally increased the discretionary spending capabilities of the First Nation bands, as well as providing aboriginal-owned businesses with industry-related opportunities.

Socially the diamond mines have had minimal impact on these communities, but traditional lifestyles have been affected because of the introduction of a wage economy. But members are starting to maximize employment gains and are once again getting back into hunting and trapping. Increased income means more money to buy new boats, motors, Ski-Doos, et cetera. The rotary work allows them more time to spend on the land.

Environmentally the diamond mines have had a significant impact on wildlife, fish, water and land; however, this has resulted in increased and enhanced awareness of responsibility of land-use management practices amongst all interested parties. This activity is largely responsible for the streamlining of the important environmental assessment process and the environmental monitoring boards.

Industry has committed to working with First Nation groups, demonstrated by many different impact benefit agreements signed. I believe the First Nations are committed to working with industry to maximize economic opportunities for its members and to maximize land issues.

However, many of my constituents feel that we as a government are failing them in the NWT as a whole in the area of resource revenue. They continue to hear of the huge profits the diamond mines are making year after year, yet the communities are....

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

Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. Beaulieu: They continue to hear of huge profits the diamond mines are making year after year, yet the communities, our ultimate residents, are not seeing the real noticeable benefits from revenue generated by these diamond mines. With the proposed budget cuts that could impact all of

us, why are we not maximizing our participation in this resource revenue agreement?

Later today I will have a follow-up statement and some questions for the Premier.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
ECONOMIC REALITIES IN
SMALL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Mr. Jacobson: Mr. Speaker, in the small communities there are many people who are economically challenged and, therefore, end up depending on government to make ends meet for themselves and their families. Government agencies, especially the Department of Health and Social Services, periodically determine what a family might require for the basics and then use these figures to assist their clients. However, there are cost differences in larger, more accessible centres such as Yellowknife, and then there are smaller rural communities in which these differences are dealt with by private and public sectors. For example, one might expect higher wages, higher isolated post allowances and subsidized housing allowances, but that's only if one is employable.

I wish to explain this a little with a real situation regarding community economics. It was only in recent years that Statistics Canada began studying aboriginal communities, and we are glad that they are doing so. Population figures are used to determine per capita allocation by both federal and territorial governments. The cost-of-living indexes are used to adjust earnings as well as issuing assistance for those who need it.

But these indexes still do not reflect the real costs associated with the smaller communities, which in reality fluctuate during the year. Fall and spring costs are usually higher because of the air transportation in some communities; they have to fly everything in. It is not an unusual sight to see a community person walk out of the store with one or two shopping bags, and with the same amount of money one would see someone else, say in Yellowknife, walking out of the store with 20 bags.

They're resourceful people, and they are out supplementing their meagre earnings by harvesting country foods.

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

Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. Jacobson: Foods from the land: caribou, moose, fish, ducks and berries.

Then, again, they are faced with the increasing cost of fuel — \$1.64 a litre in the community of Tuk. Equipment such as boats, motors, sleds, et cetera,

is getting more expensive. They are good harvesters but just can't afford to go out on the land.

My generation is in some ways very fortunate. We have access to training, instant communications and many other benefits of modern society. It's the situation of the older generation and single-parent families that worries us. Do they have enough to make ends meet? Do they feel safe and comfortable? Can they expect a more secure future? The common scenario is to see a person on social assistance or on an old age pension with empty cupboards the second week of every month.

Also becoming common, I know, are several homeless people in the community. It's sad and ironic that it has come to this — homelessness in our own homeland. Sure there are housing association committees set up to study these situations, but there are still people who have barely enough to eat and others who have no place to call home.

Mr. Speaker, I'll have questions for the appropriate Minister at the time. Thank you, colleagues.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
PROPOSED DEMOLITION OF
INUVIK LEARNING CENTRE

Mr. McLeod: Just last week the Inuvik Learning Centre had their completion ceremony, which is a ceremony that I usually try to take part in, because I'm very proud of these folks. A lot of them dropped out of school years ago and decided that education is the key to their future. They decided to go back to school and try to upgrade so they can possibly get into college or get into a trade. It's always a good time for celebration for these people.

This year, Mr. Speaker, I think that celebration is a little bit more magnified, because this may be the last year that they're celebrating their completion ceremony out of the Learning Centre. The facility that they're in now is another facility being proposed to be closed down in Inuvik. This is a very important facility to these people. They have as many as 70 students taking part in the courses that they offer there. I'm not quite sure how many completed last week, but I understand there were quite a few.

The students there had written a letter to the previous Minister of Education, and to quote a couple of lines from their letter, they talk about how everybody always talks about education and how important it is. These folks have realized that education is important to their future, their children's future, and that's why they decided to go out and try and further their education. They also go on to say that they need to be respected, that they are the future of self-government, the future of government.

I know a lot of these folks personally. They've overcome a lot of adversity to get to where they are.

It's just another example of a facility being closed down in Inuvik. I've said it before — Inuvik's being hit hard. We lost both ball fields last fall; we lost our tennis court; we lost our soccer field because of the supposed planning of our new school, which is behind schedule. Inuvik's going to have to go the next year, possibly two, without these types of recreation facilities. They have a very serious concern with the closure of the Learning Centre. They want to know if there's anything that we can do to make sure that this centre stays open.

At the appropriate time later on I will have questions for the Minister of Education.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC SERVANTS CONSIDERING RETIREMENT

Mrs. Groenewegen: Today I want to talk about the support, or lack thereof, for members of our public service by our Department of Human Resources. In recent months I've continued to hear from my constituents about their frustration in securing the most basic information, such as records of employment, information needed to initiate retirement benefits, and the list goes on. This is peculiar to me given the millions of dollars that we've invested in the best and most current communications in HR management software. It's also peculiar given the 125 positions at headquarters in the Department of Human Resources.

We're all familiar with the software rollout fiasco which cost managers an unquantifiable amount of time and resources to manage pay, leave and benefit tasks for people who worked under them.

Today I will specifically have questions for the Minister of Human Resources about the support that is offered to those employees wishing to make plans and decisions regarding their retirement options. These are very important decisions for people who serve the government, and they should be shown the respect that they are due.

Recently, through the routine broadcast of training opportunities on the government e-mail, there was a course called Pre-Retirement Planning. The cost of this course was \$400, and my question to the Minister is going to be: do we expect retiring members of our public service to pay \$400 to take a course so they can plan their retirement? Or perhaps this is just a course for managers who work in the various departments. But I'd like to focus my question today to the Minister on what support is given to members of our public service who are trying to plan their retirement options.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON IMMIGRATION OF SKILLED FOREIGN WORKERS

Mr. Hawkins: During the February session I spoke of the need for the government to establish a territorial nomination system to help speed up the immigration process for foreign skilled and semi-skilled workers who wish to become permanent residents of the Northwest Territories. Most provinces and the Yukon have an agreement with the Government of Canada that allows them to play a more direct role in selecting immigrants who wish to settle in their jurisdiction. Unfortunately, the response from the Minister indicated that the government did not see a role in facilitating the recruitment of skilled immigrants to the NWT.

Like other jurisdictions in Canada, we face serious challenges in finding and attracting skilled workers to meet the employment needs and demands of our booming economy. Our unemployment rate is at an all-time low, and both large and small employers are struggling to recruit and keep qualified employees.

The current federal immigration process is not well-equipped to respond to the need for skilled and semi-skilled workers in a timely manner. We need to find a proactive way to assist employers in recruiting qualified immigrants for jobs that cannot be filled by our local residents. I believe we can provide this type of service and maintain our commitment to training and employment opportunities for northern residents, including our possible new ones.

This is not an either/or situation. An effective labour force development strategy for the Northwest Territories would include a balanced mix of training, recruitment and employment of both skilled residents and semi-skilled foreign workers.

Again I ask the Minister to establish a support service program to our employers of the North, to help hire people and keep their businesses contributing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ACCUMULATED DEFICIT AT STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Ramsay: I'd like to speak today about Stanton Territorial Hospital. There continue to be many issues at play at Stanton that throughout this session I will be addressing in an attempt to get some answers from the Minister as to what exactly is happening at that hospital.

In speaking to health care professionals on the front line, I find there seems to be a constant disconnect between the positions that are available at the hospital and the continued reliance on agency nurses. Are we not interested in hiring more nurses who live here? Why wouldn't we look at increasing the float pool at Stanton? And, Mr. Speaker, why is there so much money being spent on overtime?

Let's talk about money, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about how it is that Stanton has been allowed to approve an \$11.5 million deficit. It was only two years ago that Members of the 15th Legislative Assembly approved, through supplementary appropriation, close to \$4 million to address the deficit that was building at Stanton Territorial Hospital.

What are the Minister's plans to deal with the \$11.5 million and the other millions of dollars of deficit that our other health authorities find themselves in?

There continues to be little in the way of accountability, whether it's from the hospital, the department, or the Minister.

We are talking about a substantial amount of money. We need to address whether Stanton is chronically underfunded or completely and utterly mismanaged. And where in the world is the Stanton master plan after years and years of planning? We are set to spend millions of dollars at Stanton in upgrades and renovations, and yet there is no master plan.

Again, Mr. Speaker, where is the accountability, and where does the responsibility lie? For me, it rests squarely on the Minister's shoulders, and I believe she has some explaining to do to the public and to the Members of this House. She has been the Minister now for several months, and she should have a very good understanding of what is happening at Stanton Territorial Hospital.

There are many, many outstanding health care professionals and employees at that hospital, and I really am getting tired of hearing from people who have just had enough of working at Stanton. They're throwing their arms up in the air, and they're saying, "I've had enough. I need out of Stanton," and they're leaving the North.

We need to address this. We need to address it head on and come up with some solutions. Mahsi.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON SHORTAGE OF HOUSING FOR TEACHERS

Mr. Menicoche: [English translation not provided.]

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak to you today about the shortage of housing for our teachers in our small and remote communities.

On two occasions this year and every fall in my riding I have at least one or two teachers who are affected by the shortage of housing, by issues with housing.

Our North, our communities really do welcome the professionals willing to come up to our small, remote communities and into the North. I know government has been working on solutions, and they have indicated there's a program to assist businesses to build and provide these homes. But right now the program that's designed will work in the larger communities but not in the small communities. Even if they did, in a small community like Jean Marie or Nahanni Butte, if a private homeowner built a home for rent, the rent would be so far out of reach, because it's very expensive.

I know that these barriers and these limitations are something we've got to work with, and I do believe that government still has to be involved here.

The stability of our teachers will benefit our children, our communities and our North. There are studies to show and prove that as the teachers remain in the community and become members of that community, there's a direct relationship to the children and to them graduating and learning.

I know that government doesn't want to circumvent the no-housing policy of 1992, but we must face the reality that maintaining this status quo affects our children and the quality of our education. So I, too, add my voice. Government must revisit the no staff housing policy and consider that our essential professional staff must be treated equitably and provided with fair living quarters. This must be resolved soon, Mr. Speaker.

Mahsi cho.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON COST OF MAINTAINING VACANT HOUSING IN FORT RESOLUTION

Mr. Abernethy: In a time of fiscal restraint it's important that the government is responsible with the money and that every dollar spent is spent well and for maximum benefit. I'd like to talk to you right now about an example of where I found government funds are not necessarily being spent in the most logical or responsible way.

On April 28 I was in Fort Res with the Standing Committee on Social Programs doing some public hearings. Prior to our public hearing we went on a tour of the community. As we were walking down the street from the band office to the school, we passed three really nice, brand-new homes — well built, well constructed, nice lots, nice property — all three of them completely vacant.

We went around the corner and we found another house, a nice little house. Apparently it was built by

students from the school as part of a trades development program — also vacant. In talking to the people from the community, it became obvious that these houses were actually built by the NWT Housing Corporation as part of the home ownership program. Unfortunately, upon completion of building these houses, the Housing Corp found that there was nobody eligible to purchase the homes. So for two years those homes have been sitting vacant in Fort Res, unused, getting older, and the government continues to maintain them, continues to heat them, continues to make sure that there's water. To me, this isn't necessarily a logical way to spend our money.

I understand the value of housing. I think housing is important and we need to make sure that there's available housing. But if there are no eligible candidates in the community, I'm not sure why we would build the houses themselves. It would probably have been a lot better to actually go to the community, find out if there are eligible candidates, and if there are eligible candidates, work with those candidates to construct homes. Once again, I believe this is a poor use of funds. I think we need to solve this problem. We need to find some way to use those houses in that community to the maximum benefit of the people in Fort Res.

Later today I'll be asking the Minister Responsible for the Housing Corp. some questions concerning these houses and the government's program with respect to home ownership and how they decide where they're going to build houses and when. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL OIL SUPPLY LEVELS

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned about more and more instances of news reports about the supply of oil, which we all know is also getting more and more expensive.

Mr. Speaker, the International Energy Agency is the energy forum for 27 industrialized countries, including Canada. They share energy information, coordinate their energy policies and cooperate in the development of rational energy programs. One of the objectives of the organization is to maintain and improve systems for coping with supply disruptions.

On Thursday, May 22 — the very day that our Minister of Finance was presenting the budget to this House — the International Energy Agency announced that it is studying depletion rates of oil at about 400 oil fields around the globe in its first-ever study of world oil supply. Our Chief Economist Birol said, "We are entering a new world energy order." The study will be released in November but was prompted by concern about the volatility of

world oil markets and uncertainty about supply levels.

Obviously, we know what's happening to the price here. It was recently \$135. I'm not on top of it this week. It's of great concern and relevance to our residents. We currently depend on oil for the transport of our food and energy supplies and, really, for the basic survival of our residents and the systems of support we provide to them. I'm concerned about the planning we have done to ensure that our capacity for dealing with significant disruptions in oil supply is in force. I understand there's an energy planning coordinating committee in most communities but that we have done in the coordinator positions.

I'd like to ask the Minister of MACA some questions about this, this afternoon. Thank you very much.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON SUPPORT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, the government must do everything it can to ensure the protection of those among us who have disabilities, by way of mobility, wheelchair bound, from accessing public facilities to accessing public housing. The government must do everything it can to improve the quality of life of these individuals, as they are the ones that we are here to protect.

Mr. Speaker, I watched a young man struggling to push his wheelchair down the street in Fort McPherson by way of the mud and the gravel, thinking "That's a challenge." After talking to his dad, I found out this individual had nowhere to live, so he had to access public housing. The housing authority had to build a ramp for this individual to get into the unit. Yet after talking to his dad, I learned that this young man had to struggle and pull himself in and out of his wheelchair to get into the washroom because his wheelchair was too wide and he couldn't get through the door. He had to get out of his wheelchair, crawl into the washroom, crawl back out, get into his wheelchair, wheelchair his way down the hallway, go to his bedroom, crawl off his wheelchair, crawl into his bedroom and vice versa.

Mr. Speaker, in this day and age individuals with disabilities should not have to struggle to go to a washroom or have to struggle to get in and out of a public housing unit in our communities. This government and the Housing Corporation must develop a policy that allows for disabled housing in our communities, and also by way of seniors' housing in regard to our aging population. I think it's critical to have to hear these stories from parents in regard to their struggling children who are in wheelchairs. Also, by way of access to public housing, the individuals have to wait three months

before they are allowed into public housing because they have to move to another community.

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

Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. Krutko: Again, Mr. Speaker, the individual had to move to Inuvik with his dad, because his dad got a job in Inuvik. Now he wants to move back to Fort McPherson, because his dad's job will expire June 31. Yet it's been less than a year since his dad left Fort McPherson, and now he's being told by the housing authorities, "Sorry; you cannot get into a public housing unit, because you are not a resident of Fort McPherson." If anything, a person with a disability should be our top priority and go to the front of the list for housing.

With that, I will be asking the Minister of housing questions on this matter, because I think it does need some urgent attention. These people struggle enough as it is to get through life without us as government putting barriers in their way. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON RECOGNITION OF FATHER JEAN POCHAT

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: [English translation not provided.]

This year marks a significant recognition for one of my well-respected community members of Behchoko, Father Pochat.

Mr. Speaker, considered a young man among the Tlicho Nation, Father Pochat celebrated his 80th birthday on April 18. Grandon College alumni held a special celebration event as well on May 17 to 18 to recognize Father Pochat for making positive changes in their lives.

Mr. Speaker, Father Pochat was the head administrator of Grandon College in Fort Smith from 1950 to 1970. Under his leadership the college produced many of today's Northerners, the leaders, including former Western Arctic MP Ethel Blondin-Andrews, former Premier Stephen Kakfwi, Tlicho Grand Chief George Mackenzie and, of course, two MLAs sitting here with us, Mr. Bob McLeod and Mike Miltenberger.

Father Pochat received the Order of Canada in 2006, one of the highest honours in Canada, for over five decades of lifetime achievement.

Mr. Speaker, we thank Father Pochat for all the years of service. Mahsi.

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

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

Mr. Speaker: It gives me great pleasure today to introduce a constituent and good friend of mine; Dawna O'Brien is in the Chamber today. Also, my constituency assistant, Deb Mageean, is in the gallery today.

We also have, visiting us here at the Legislative Assembly, students from grades 5 and 6 from École Boréale in Hay River, doing a tour of Yellowknife and the Legislative Assembly. I'll introduce a few of them and then turn it over to my colleague from Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

I'd like to introduce Kelly Rose Hiebert, Jasmine St. John and Desiree Bouchard, and special recognition to my oldest grandson, Logan Gagnier.

Mrs. Groenewegen: It is also my pleasure today to welcome the grades 5 and 6 students from École Boréale to the Legislative Assembly. I'd like to recognize my constituency assistant and thank her and your assistant, Mr. Speaker, for their help in planning this event today. I'd also like to recognize the teachers of these students: Kim Ivanko and Patrick Poisson. I'd also like to recognize the students — and give us a big wave — Mason Bruneau, Paige Kruger, Andrew Payeur and Andrea Walker.

Mr. Menicoche: I'd like to recognize in the gallery a constituent, Mrs. Candy Brown, from Fort Simpson.

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize a constituent and all the good work he does in the community in the area of addictions: Mr. Bern Richards.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to recognize somebody who's travelled down from Inuvik, Mr. Norm Snowshoe, as well as my executive assistant, Bobby-Jo Greenland.

Mr. Krutko: I, too, would like to recognize Mr. Norm Snowshoe and Bobby-Jo Greenland, formerly from Aklavik and Fort McPherson, who are now living in Inuvik.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: I as well have the honour to be able to recognize two constituents from Fort Smith, members of the Seniors' Society, Mrs. Bea Campbell and Mr. Leon Peterson. Welcome.

Mr. Abernethy: I'd like to recognize Blake Lyons, the president of the Yellowknife Seniors' Society, an ex-city councillor and a constituent.

Hon. Michael McLeod: I want to recognize a couple of people. First of all, Blake Lyons, former president of the NWT Association of Communities, and also a guy I went to college with: Norman Snowshoe, with whom I spent many long nights... studying.

Laughter.

Hon. Michael McLeod: He has now decided to enter the political arena and is running for the presidency of the Gwich'in Tribal Council. I'd like to welcome him here and also wish him the best of luck.

Mr. McLeod: I'd like to recognize, down from Inuvik, Lillian Elias. I'd also like to recognize my sister-in-law, Bobby-Jo Greenland.

Hon. Bob McLeod: I'd like to recognize Joseph Lanzon. I believe he used to work here in the Legislative Assembly in a previous life and now lives in Ottawa.

Mr. Jacobson: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and privilege to recognize Ms. Jean Gruben, one of my constituents from Tuktoyaktuk, in the House.

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great honour to recognize from the NWT Seniors' Society board of directors Leon Peterson from Fort Smith, Bea Campbell from Fort Smith, Eileen Collins from Hay River, Terry Villeneuve from Fort Resolution-Deninu Ku'e, Florence Barnaby from Radilih Koe'-Fort Good Hope, Lillian Elias from Inuvik, Jean Gruben from Tuktoyaktuk, Blake Lyons from Yellowknife, and Barb Hood, of course, the executive director.

I'd also like to recognize Norm Snowshoe. When we were going to school, we really did study hard.

Ms. Bisaro: I also wanted to recognize Barb Hood, the executive director of the NWT Seniors' Society.

Mr. Hawkins: I'd like to recognize Mr. Jim White. He's the executive director of the Yellowknife Housing Authority here in Yellowknife and has come to a number of sessions. He does a good job down there.

Sorry to disappoint Mr. Abernethy, but I'd also like to recognize Mr. Blake Lyons as my constituent.

Mr. Speaker: If we've missed anyone in the gallery today, thanks for being here. I hope you're enjoying the proceedings. It's always nice to have an audience in here.

Item 6, acknowledgements. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Beaulieu.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 192-16(2) DEVOLUTION AND RESOURCE REVENUE SHARING

Mr. Beaulieu: Earlier this afternoon I spoke about the impact that the diamond mines have on the Tu Nedhe riding in relation to the diamond industry and the resource revenue arrangements for the NWT. I'd like to ask the Premier if he would tell us what discussions his government has had with the federal government regarding resource revenue sharing.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. The Hon. Premier, Mr. Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: We've had a number of discussions, both with the federal government as well as with the regional aboriginal leadership, around the issue of devolution and resource revenue sharing. I've had an opportunity to speak with the Prime Minister on this issue, as well as with Minister Strahl, regarding devolution and resource revenue sharing. We continue to have some discussions and try to see where we may be able to move this file.

Mr. Beaulieu: Can the Premier tell us: what is the position of this current government with respect to resource revenue sharing?

Hon. Floyd Roland: The first position we came forward with was one to see where we were as the Government of the Northwest Territories, have an initial meeting with the regional aboriginal leadership and see if there was continued support from the groups on moving forward with this file. In the last government there was a proposal sent forward to the government. We had that discussion. We know the same groups continue to be on side. Others say they've got other initiatives to proceed with before they want to see this file moved along. So we've had that discussion.

From our perspective, as Members know, we're looking to improve programs and services across the North. We know we need a new revenue source. We continue to work along the lines of wanting to move this file forward and, hopefully, bringing it to a conclusion so all Northerners can benefit from the development that happens here in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Beaulieu: Can the Premier tell us what impacts resource revenue sharing could have on our budget and our current transfer payment system?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Past numbers have been put out there; for example, dollar figures in the area of \$224 million a year that flow to Ottawa in the form of royalties. Now the federal government says the

Norman Wells situation has to be excluded from that. We look at the last public accounts that were filed with the federal government, and the most recent figure that we've seen from the other mining industries has shown that it's been in the neighbourhood of \$34 million. You take a look at the equalization program that has formulated along with the territorial formula financing, and the inclusion and exclusion — 50 per cent included and 50 per cent excluded. That means, for example, the last public account number of \$34 million: if you split that in half, that's how we would benefit in the North.

Mr. Beaulieu: Just a question for the Premier on whether or not the \$17 million benefit as a result of resource revenue sharing is a full increase of what we get now or if that's what we're going to get — period.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Under the existing scenario it would fluctuate year to year, depending on what the industry in the North pays to the federal government. It did at one point — I believe it was 2003–2004 numbers — and then we combined it with the mining, oil and gas development in the North, along with Norman Wells, and we came up with a figure of approximately \$224 million.

Estimates have been made. For example, if the Mackenzie gas pipeline falls in place, that could almost double or even go larger, depending on the royalty rate that's put in place. But we know, for example, that royalties aren't paid until some of the corporate costs are paid off. That's what happened, for example, with our mining industry. So if they reinvest again, as the mines have done in the North, we've also seen the reason for the drop in the royalty payments.

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Great Slave, Mr. Abernethy.

QUESTION 193-16(2)
COST OF MAINTAINING VACANT
HOUSING IN FORT RESOLUTION

Mr. Abernethy: My questions today are to the Minister Responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation and relate specifically to the houses that were constructed in Fort Res that now sit vacant. It's my understanding that at least three of these homes were built by the Housing Corp. through the home ownership program and that, once constructed, there were no eligible candidates to actually take over those houses. So they've been sitting vacant for two years.

My question to the Minister is: what criteria are used in determining which community these homes are built in, in anticipation that they will be purchased through the home ownership program?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Member. The honourable Minister Responsible for the Housing Corporation, Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of criteria. Availability of clients would be one, of course. Another key piece is the whole issue of land and the interest by the community.

Mr. Abernethy: Once again to the Minister Responsible for the Housing Corp. Clearly, in this case there were no eligible candidates. I'd be curious, first, why they were actually built in that community.

Secondly, now that we know there are no candidates and the houses have sat vacant for two years, I'm wondering what the Housing Corp. is planning to do and whether they're planning to work with, say, Education, Culture and Employment to find alternative uses for those houses. Every day that we leave those houses vacant and we have to pay for heat, it costs the government. So what are the plans, and how does the Housing Corp. plan to dispose of this asset, whether through selling it or giving it to another department to use it another way?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: There are a number of possibilities that are being considered. In other communities we have rented the units to professionals, those who want to rent it at market rent. We're possibly looking at replacing some of the older units, those that aren't worth fixing, with public housing, because O&M money is a significant issue. We have to keep our portfolio in check. We're prepared, in some cases, to sell the units if there's interest in the community as well. So there are a number of options that are available.

Mr. Abernethy: I was wondering if I can get from the Minister some sort of commitment as to when something might actually happen with these houses. The longer they sit vacant, the more they cost us. At a time of fiscal restraint it seems like a bit of a poor use of our public funds. Can I get some commitment or a timeline on when we might see those assets disposed of in some way?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Speaker, I will commit to provide to the Chair of the Social Programs Committee a brief note that lays out the plan for the units in Fort Resolution.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister. The Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

QUESTION 194-16(2)
HOUSING FOR FAMILIES
WITH DISABLED PARENTS

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to follow up on the Member's statement by my

colleague Mr. Krutko. As he stated, there's certainly recognition that the availability of housing for disabled persons is a problem in the Territories.

Within Yellowknife the Housing Corporation recently built an eight-plex unit that was specifically earmarked for people with disabilities. That's great that it was built, but these eight units are only open to people who are single or who are married couples. I'd like to ask the Minister for the Housing Corporation how a disabled single mother with children would be accommodated under this scenario.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. The honourable Minister Responsible for the Housing Corporation, Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Speaker, every effort would be made to accommodate the hypothetical scenario put forward by my colleague. I'd need a bit more of the specifics to be able to look at exactly what may be available not just for those particular units; there may be other options as well in Yellowknife.

Ms. Bisaro: I understand that things have to be looked at, but this family is currently housed in public housing. They have a lease that is going to be expiring on the 30th of June, and they've been advised that their lease will not be renewed. I'd like to ask the Housing Minister what policy or what restrictions are in place that would force this family to move out of their home.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Speaker, if the Member would give me the particulars outside this House, I would be happy to check into those issues she's raised. I can't answer specifically in this House. She's referring to some folks who are clearly in need, but it's an issue for which I need particulars I could track down. It's not appropriate to talk about those particular issues in this House.

Ms. Bisaro: I will follow up with you.

I'd like to know whether or not the Minister can advise if there are any plans in the near future to build housing units within the city of Yellowknife for families where the parent or parents may be disabled and they happen to have children — two children, let's say, or three or four.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Speaker, we're in the final year of the fiscal year we're currently in of the Affordable Housing Initiative. I don't have, off the top of my head, the configuration of what's actually been planned for the city of Yellowknife, but I'll commit, once again, to get that information, and I'll provide it to the Chair of the Social Programs Committee so he can share that information.

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

QUESTION 195-16(2)
ACCUMULATED DEFICIT AT
STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. It gets back to my Member's statement from earlier today, when I talked of the accrued deficit that's building up at Stanton Territorial Hospital. It's nearing 11 and a half million dollars. I mentioned earlier that it was just two and a half years ago that Members of this House approved millions of dollars to help address the deficit situation at Stanton through supplementary appropriation.

I'd like to ask the Minister, first of all, what is the government's plan to address the 11 and a half million dollar deficit that's been allowed to accrue due to mismanagement or underfunding at that hospital?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. The honourable Minister of Health, Ms. Lee.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, over the last two or three years, as the Member stated, the Stanton health authority has been experiencing a significant amount of deficit. It did have surpluses even before that. The government, over the years, has provided infusions of cash, but it was thought that it was important to figure out exactly what was causing the deficit — whether or not the authority was being underfunded or whether there were other ways to control the growth of spending. So there has not been any infusion of cash while we're going through this.

I would like to advise the Member that I believe the document to deal with the deficit is now in the hands of the standing committee, and we will be able to debate and then work on that issue during the life of this session, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, the Minister mentioned that we haven't provided an infusion of cash, but just two and a half years ago we spent millions of dollars as an infusion of cash to address the deficit at that hospital. I'm asking the Minister: what is the government's plan today to address the 11 and a half million dollar deficit at Stanton Territorial Hospital?

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, when the Member states that the government has given millions and millions of infusion, I think it should be noted that it was in the amount of about \$1.3 million two years ago. The policy is that each authority has to be responsible for 50 per cent of a deficit. That's been the policy that we've been following. I think that it was incumbent on the government to know exactly what was causing the cost overruns not only with

the Stanton Territorial Health Authority but also with the Beaufort-Delta Health and Social Services Authority, which has another significant deficit, as well as some of the minor ones.

Mr. Speaker, I can advise you — and the Member is well aware of this, because I did provide a briefing to the Standing Committee on Social Programs on April 30, where the Member was present. I did go through the initial findings of the zero-based review, which did review some of the spending questions. I have appointed a new public administrator with a very wide mandate to look at more details into what might be possible reasons. I have asked that the public administrator make recommendations to me within three months, which I have committed to the committee to go back to.

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Minister for letting everybody know that I attended that committee briefing. Thank you.

I also wanted to ask the Minister — and she mentioned it. Between a year and a half and two years ago, when it appeared through a supplementary appropriation, and today, what is causing the cost overruns and the accrued deficit in our health authorities? The Minister should know what is causing that, and we should be able to address it, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, I believe this is an issue about health care costs. It's not about a this-side or a that-side issue. It's a consensus government issue, and it's one that we need to work on together.

I can tell the Member, Mr. Speaker, that the zero-based review has given us an idea about how much shortfall the authorities are experiencing, and it's strictly financial cost accounting kind of information.

I need more information, more detailed information, as to whether or not there should be changes needed in the way we deliver our programs, whether we should be delivering the programs that we are, and if not, how. Should there be amalgamation of programs, or are there programs that we can no longer afford? Are there other ways of doing this? Those are the kinds of questions that the Member should expect the Minister of Health to do. I am doing that. I will have those results, and I will be reporting to the House through the committee.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess it's consensus by convenience some days in the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories.

I'd like to ask the Minister: who today is currently paying the payroll at Stanton Territorial Hospital? Thank you.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, as the Member has already stated — and this is public information — Stanton territorial authority has an accumulated deficit of \$11 million, and it is not able to make all of its payrolls. FMBS is assuming that responsibility at the moment. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

QUESTION 196-16(2) WRIGLEY FERRY SERVICE

Mr. Menicoche: Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Transportation. I've been getting numerous phone calls from the community of Wrigley. As well, I've received a petition with regard to the N'Dulee ferry not being operated, and they're very concerned about it being delayed a week already. They do not know how much longer it'll be delayed. If the Minister can answer that question. Mahsi.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Transportation, Mr. Yakeleya.

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: Mahsi. Mr. Speaker, the N'Dulee ferry has undergone some major refits. I'd advise the Member and the good people of Wrigley that our department has put a lot of resources into this issue. We're keeping the community of Wrigley and also the Member updated on the status of when we can get the ferry into the water to deal with the issue of their children going to Hay River for the track and field event.

Mr. Menicoche: Absolutely that's the content of the petition. The schoolchildren are very concerned about making the track and field event, which is one of the best attended events in our North, and with our gracious host.

Once again, the communities still don't understand why the department waited until springtime to conduct these repairs when they should have been done before and not interrupt the travelling public, not to mention the residents of Wrigley who want to get out, too, for their grocery shopping, et cetera.

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: Mr. Speaker, our first priority within the department is the safety of our facilities, our streets, our roads.

When we originally looked at the refit for the N'Dulee ferry, when the scope of work was laid out, it was planned that we would do this before any of this type of delay would be happening for this specific ferry.

When we looked at the refit and saw that further work needed to get done within the ferry, that required us to put in extra resources and time, and those other circumstances that happened are out of our control.

Again, we want to make sure that we do a proper job. Safety is number one, and sometimes it does make it inconvenient for people in small communities.

I come from a small community in our region, in Sahtu, and we are also aware of these winter roads and the undue circumstances that happen that hinder our transportation of goods — and people to events such as the well-attended event that is happening in Hay River.

Mr. Menicoche: Well, the next logical question. They've been telling me: "Our trip's been interrupted. We've done our planning; the department didn't. Is the department willing to contribute to some of the costs of getting us across the river, getting us to our sporting event?" Indeed, constituents are also asking for assistance to get out, because it's not their fault, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: Mr. Speaker, I want to let the Members know that when the department looks at major refits of our ferries or operations, we do very meticulous planning in terms of things that are happening and what needs to happen.

I took on the job in October. I had to look at what things had to get done. I asked these serious questions. The department has looked at this type of operation that needs to happen. Safety is number one. I do sympathize with the people in Wrigley and other communities. I have faced similar situations, and we're doing everything within our means to make sure that the ferry is in before the track and field event does take place.

However, our first priority, again, is safety. If we do not do an adequate job, we would come to this situation again in the middle of our operations, and that's something that we're not entertaining right now.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr. Menicoche.

Mr. Menicoche: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the Minister: is there an expected operating date when the repairs will be completed, and could they convey the progress to the community of Wrigley as they see it? Mahsi.

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: Mr. Speaker, I've informed my officials to keep the community of Wrigley informed in terms of the dates. We're working very hard to ensure that the ferry operation is in the waters by the end of this month, and have it tested, have it inspected, have it checked off okay so that we could help out the community of Wrigley. Certainly we'll do everything in our powers to make sure this happens and put some smiles on some of the children in Wrigley.

QUESTION 197-16(2)
COMMUNITY ENERGY SUPPLY
EMERGENCY PLANS

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. I know he was well practised in the swimming actions there. I'm interested if our ferries are dead in the water without a fuel supply. Other than that response, has the Minister ensured, given the volatility of fuel supplies and the increasing uncertainty, that our communities have developed effective emergency management plans to deal with that situation?

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, Mr. Michael McLeod.

Hon. Michael McLeod: Mr. Speaker, the issue of oil, fuel, and the associated costs, and supply is certainly something that we wrestle with on a daily basis. Today I think the price of oil is pegged at over \$1.28. All our communities across the North face the challenges of not only the high costs but the additional costs of transportation and having it delivered to our communities. In most cases our communities are responsible for their own supply. There is a market in most of the communities.

We, on the other hand, as a government look after the supply and storage and sale in 15 communities across the North. More recently we've also incorporated supply for the Power Corporation, and that's brought on an additional 20 sites, which has given us a lot more flexibility in terms of economies of scale.

We have had numerous discussions with suppliers across the North, and we have looked at alternate methods of getting the fuel into the communities, especially the communities on the north end of the Northwest Territories, from Norman Wells north along the river system in the Beaufort area. We are looking at markets in California and also in Asia that will allow us to have flexibility. If there's a short supply in one area, that will allow us to go to a different area. So we've had quite a bit of discussion.

In terms of an emergency fuel supply it's something that's always, of course, an issue. We deal with it on a situation-by-situation basis. However, we've not had that situation in isolated communities. It's something we continue to work on.

All our communities are responsible for energy plans, and this is something that they would look at also. We've had a number of communities move forward on those plans, and we continue to work on that.

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, I'll take that as a no, in effect.

The Minister has not ensured that there are emergency plans. Every community in the Northwest Territories faces this potential. I'm talking about the declining ability of global production to meet global demand, and of course, we're totally dependent on demand. As per my Member's statement there's solid evidence that that concern is increasing.

I'm looking for a commitment from the Minister. Will the Minister commit to do more than just discussing it and actually put in place emergency plans if communities are faced with a complete lack of fuel supply, oil in particular?

Hon. Michael McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how he got a no out of what I thought was a yes.

All our communities have an adequate supply. We have the ability to make alternate arrangements if there is a situation where there is a need. We've not encountered that. We have new sources of supply that don't lock us into one source. We're flexible, and our fuel provider has indicated to us that there are a number of different areas where they can get the fuel from, so it's not an issue.

An emergency fuel supply at this point I don't think is something we need to do. We have adequate facilities in each community that will provide that fuel, and to have a commitment to say that we will have an emergency supply is just something that we're not ready to do at this point.

Mr. Bromley: Thank you for those remarks. I'm not necessarily insisting that we have an emergency fuel supply, but I would like to know that the communities have some plan to deal with a complete shortage. Even if they do have an emergency supply, perhaps it won't be enough to get them through a period of time when the oil shortage occurs.

In 1973, of course, we experienced that with gasoline, but now with peak oil, we're on the declining side. We're on the other side of 50 per cent of the fuel oil availability in the world, so this is a real situation. We're entering sort of a new era, if you will, and that's what these agencies are realizing, and I think we need to be progressive.

So, again, will the Minister commit to encouraging, promoting emergency preparedness plans for serious and significant disruptions in oil supplies by the communities?

Hon. Michael McLeod: Mr. Speaker, we do have all communities working on an integrated sustainability plan for the long term, and part of that plan is to have the capital plan included, the human resource plan and also a community energy plan. Thirty-two communities have already completed their portion of the capital process and the capital

plans. We have eight communities that are working on energy plans.

Now, we have a system where we have resources and will continue to support the communities to look at other sources of fuel. At this point we have not indicated and earmarked any sort of alternate energy or additional fuel sources that we would specifically term as emergency. It's something we'd like to have at some point. At this point we're not in the position to have the communities specifically earmark alternate energy or an alternate fuel system in case of an emergency. That's something that would have to come down the road.

Mr. Speaker: Final short supplementary, Mr. Bromley.

Mr. Bromley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for those remarks, Minister. Of course, this is a real situation. Inuvik failed to get their fuel supply last year, and the surrounding communities suffered accordingly. Residents paid more and so on. But it wasn't a real shortage, and that's obviously a real possibility.

For the Minister's information, catastrophic events are going up by about an order of magnitude around the world, both in costs and frequency, so we can expect this to be a real situation.

I understand that we're losing our emergency preparedness coordinator. I'm asking that the Minister reconsider that. Will the Minister reconsider that position in light of this increasing need for emergency preparedness? Thank you.

Hon. Michael McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I fully recognize that there have been emergency situations and that fuel is of short supply. Incidents happen across the world. We have not yet encountered that in the Northwest Territories. We've had situations where some fuel suppliers were not able to get the supply that they required. They were able to work around it. We provided support and will continue to do that.

We recently met with some of the people that deliver the fuel and talked about looking at new methods and new sources and trying to rectify the situation that happened last year. We are not in a position right now to reconsider the position that has been targeted for reduction. We are, on the other hand, hiring and creating a new position titled sustainability coordinator, which will be funded through gas tax dollars. It will provide direct support to the communities that will continue to work on this plan. There are four different areas, but all communities are working on it, and this will help them complete those documents.

QUESTION 198-16(2)
SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC SERVANTS
CONSIDERING RETIREMENT

Mrs. Groenewegen: Mr. Speaker, in my Member's statement I talked about the fact that I get calls from constituents on a fairly consistent basis talking about their frustration with getting information on retirement options and support for planning their retirement and then acquiring the pension benefits that are due to them. There are certainly examples of private- and public-sector industry standards in this area. I want to make sure that our public service is entitled to, and is receiving, that same level of service that anyone else would expect.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister of Human Resources what kind of support is available now in the Department of Human Resources for people who are wanting to plan for their retirement options.

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Human Resources.

Hon. Bob McLeod: We have pension specialists within the Department of Human Resources who are available to assist. Also, all employees are encouraged to take pre-retirement training programs through their department.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Is the pre-retirement program that was advertised and sent out to all government recipients — the one that costs \$400 — intended for people planning to retire? Does our government expect retiring employees to pay \$400 to learn about their retirement options?

Hon. Bob McLeod: Mr. Speaker, our government is very supportive of pre-retirement planning. Generally, if the training is approved by the supervisor, we pay for their costs. If there is a cost associated with the pre-retirement training program — and I should point out that many of the courses we put on through our GNWT training calendar have costs associated with them — we would cover those costs if they're approved by our supervisors.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Just so I understand: if an employee was coming up for retirement and wanted to take the two-day pre-retirement course and there was a fee of \$400, the territorial government might or might not pay for that, depending on the approval of the manager of that employee. Is that correct?

Hon. Bob McLeod: Mr. Speaker, generally, we encourage employees to take the pre-retirement training earlier in their careers rather than a year or six months before the time to retire, and generally, we pay for one pre-retirement training course per employee.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Mr. Speaker, in information I was able to get from the Department of Human Resources, they said there's currently a backlog of requests for personalized pension counselling. I'd like to know what the nature of that backlog is and why, for a department with 125 employees in headquarters, there would be a backlog.

Hon. Bob McLeod: I guess there are a number of reasons for the backlog. Our government workforce is aging. I think 40 per cent of our employees are eligible to retire within the next ten years, so I would expect that is the reason for the backlog.

QUESTION 199-16(2)
SOCIAL SERVICES SUPPORTS
IN SMALL COMMUNITIES

Mr. Jacobson: Mr. Speaker, would the Department of ECE perhaps consider increasing income support allocations in the small communities?

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Lafferty.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has recently increased our income security program to meet the needs of the community — the demands of the high cost of living in the community: the clothing, the food, the shelter. So we did increase in that area. That is one area that has been highlighted from our previous visit to the communities. So that has been initiated.

Mr. Jacobson: That was quick, Mr. Minister. Thank you.

Would the government, perhaps the Minister of ECE, consider setting the task force to study homelessness in the smaller communities?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Jacobson. We are going into a different line of questioning here. I will allow the Minister to answer. Mr. Lafferty.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. To deal with the isolated small communities, those particularly without road access, we do provide funding for shelters or programming, and certainly my department can work with the Member to highlight what we have done, what we have currently in the program. I can certainly assist with those communities based on their needs to deal with homelessness. So we do have programs available for that.

Mr. Speaker: Supplementary, Mr. Jacobson.

Mr. Jacobson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have none at this time.

QUESTION 200-16(2)
BARRIER-FREE HOUSING FOR
DISABLED PERSONS IN
SMALL COMMUNITIES

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, in regard to my Member's statement in the area of people with disabilities that live in small communities and the challenges that they face — more importantly, the lack of houses in our communities to accommodate people with disabilities — this government has taken steps to look at barrier-free houses. I know that the Member for Yellowknife mentioned that there were the eight units built here in Yellowknife. In regard to barrier-free houses, we have built houses in seniors' housing which are barrier-free. We have built seniors' facilities which are barrier-free. We have the expertise in-house to do that, yet we seem to have a problem accommodating people in small communities, to be able to facilitate them with the adequate housing that they need which are barrier-free.

I have been in contact with the Minister on a particular matter in Fort McPherson, about an individual and his son who is in a wheelchair. I'd like to ask the Minister: exactly what is his department doing to look at barrier-free houses in small communities to accommodate people with disabilities?

Mr. Speaker: The Minister Responsible for the Housing Corporation, Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Speaker, we intend to follow the same process in all communities where there is an identified need. As we are working with communities to look at the housing configuration as to what is most appropriate, I do agree with the government that there are some things that should probably become standard design for all houses — things like three-foot doorways and access for an event, if something happens if an individual is in the house. So the Member has raised some good points.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, as government our public infrastructure is aging; we have to replace it. I think this is probably a good time to build that concept into reality, build it into our business plan, build it into our housing strategies and initiatives. I'd like to ask the Minister: exactly how soon can we see some of these initiatives put in place, knowing we are expending money already to basically do upgrades on public housing units by way of retrofits? Will you consider looking at those retrofit dollars, at those facilities for renovating, to see if we can implement some of these projects in communities where you have individuals who are disabled, in a wheelchair, or perhaps have mobility problems that we need to accommodate?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Once we conclude this budget process, we're going to be moving almost immediately into the business planning process for 2009–2010. We'd be willing and interested to come forward in the business plan. We could discuss those issues as well, sit down with the Chair of the Social Programs and the other Members to look at how we can make changes to the program delivery to better reflect the needs and issues raised by the Member.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, also in my Member's statement I took issue with regard to the residency clause that's in place for individuals who are born and raised in their home communities. They're band members in those communities, but if they leave the community for less than a year and come back to the home community, they have to wait three months before they can get into public housing. Yet there are vacancies.

I'd like to ask the Minister: is there a possibility that the Minister or the department can make special exemptions for people who are disabled, people who have already been in public housing within that year when there are vacancies on the board so that they don't have to wait three months before they can get public housing? I'd like to ask the Minister if he's able to do anything in that area.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Speaker, the Member has raised another good point. In the case that he's referring to, there has been contact made with the community, and I believe the three-month residency has been waived in that particular instance.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Most jurisdictions in Canada, the provinces and whatnot, have a housing strategy. Part of that strategy looks at seniors' housing, family homes, retirement homes, disabled housing, homeless shelters. They look at every type of housing that's out there. So I'd like to ask the Minister: would his department take on a strategic plan to look at the holistic process for housing from the time you're born until the time you pass away — 80 to 90 years of housing that people go through? I think it's about time this government took on that initiative. I think we won't have these problems in our communities with housing for the disabled, accommodating people with disabilities or mobility problems such as aging.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: The Housing Corporation just released their Framework for Action to lay out the plan for the next number of years. It's been to the appropriate committee. We've received feedback with some suggestions that we're going to look at. We're going to look at improving that document as we move forward. There will be the business planning process coming

up as well that will allow us to further refine that document.

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes, Mr. Robert McLeod.

QUESTION 201-16(2)
PROPOSED DEMOLITION OF THE
INUVIK LEARNING CENTRE

Mr. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, in my Member's statement I spoke to the proposed demolition of the Learning Centre in Inuvik. I would like to pose my questions today to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. I'd like to ask: what's the status of the adult Learning Centre right now? When is it slated for demolition?

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Lafferty.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, there was a petition, as the Member indicated in his Member's statement, to myself from the students of Inuvik concerned about the closing down of the facility. Currently the status is that the facility is scheduled to close in August 2008. It was under the advisement of the Department of Public Works and Services due to safety concerns. Public Works and Services also manages the risk management and safety programs that assess the condition and safety of all GNWT assets and buildings. Due to that fact we're in a situation at this point, but we are looking at other options as well.

Mr. McLeod: I'd like to ask the Minister if it was an engineer's report or a report done in-house as to the safety concerns. If so, would he be willing to share that report with myself?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: The safety aspect of it was administered by Public Works and Services. There is a report being done on this particular facility, the building. It is a 1960s building. There are problems with the foundation, the structure itself. Public Works and Services would have the report, and I'm sure the Minister of Public Works and Services is willing to share it with the Member upon request.

Mr. McLeod: I think I heard the Minister state that the report was being done. I'm confused. Is the report being done, or is the report that's recommended the closure of the Learning Centre for safety reasons already completed?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: The report is complete on the building itself.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr. McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: Needless to say, Inuvik is becoming quite concerned with the closure and demolition of all our facilities around the community. I'd like to

ask the Minister whose responsibility it is to find new facilities for the students that are using this facility right now. What's to become of them?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, it does involve various parties to find the needs of the community, where they should be placed and so forth. We as the GNWT, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, continue to work closely with Public Works and Services on finding solutions to the situation we're in. We're also identifying another location — an Environment and Natural Resources office potentially. We are looking at all options, because the time is near. August is coming. We're doing what we can as the Department of Education to find a suitable location for these students, because we want these students to continue learning. That's one of our priorities that we'll continue to push. Mahsi.

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Hawkins.

QUESTION 202-16(2)
IMMIGRATION OF
SKILLED FOREIGN WORKERS

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, in my Member's statement today I talked about the foreign fieldworkers problem that we have here in Yellowknife — and not just here in Yellowknife but throughout the territory. It's been noted many times over at length — and it's probably exhausting to hear — how exciting and booming our economy is, but the fact is that businesses are suffering out here as well. We have a good economy, but we have businesses that can't hire people to work there. We've had good examples throughout our city just alone.

When people have to close their business and close their doors because they can't hire staff, that kind of makes you wonder who it is booming for. The problem arises, as I've noted, that they can't hire staff, and potentially hiring foreign workers could help solve a lot of problems.

My question to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment is: if the Yukon government can strike an agreement with the Government of Canada and other provinces can strike some agreement and balance with the Government of Canada, would the Department of Education, Culture and Employment look at and strive to strike some agreement so we can hire and work through the paperwork for foreign workers?

Mr. Speaker: The Minister for Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Lafferty.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, we were just made aware that the Yukon government signed an MOU on the immigration nomination system program. As of last week, as soon as we heard the

news, our department's been working closely with their government department on the MOU. So we are making progress in this area.

Our department staff has been continuously working with their staff. There have been various calls coming to our department, so we're fully aware of what the Members are highlighting here today. We're doing what we can, as the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, working with the Yukon government on what's actually in agreement. It may be something similar that we're working on.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the answer from the Minister, and I'm certainly glad to hear that the Yukon situation is now on our radar. I'm going to go in this direction with this problem, which is timing. Timing is an issue. I can speak of one business in particular that is closing, because they just cannot continue to work seven days a week without being able to find staff to work at their shop anymore. So timing is the issue.

Now that the Minister is aware of a possible framework program out there, will the Minister commit to working on this problem to see if we can get a person directed to this task and work on solving this problem by the end of summer?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, we did meet with several businesses here in Yellowknife that are dealing with these challenges at hand. Due to that fact, we did have somebody in the department committed to working on this particular piece of work. They are following through with this. Due to the request of the Member for timelines, we have to do what we can with the current system. We're working with the federal government on the portal, as well. We do have agreements with them, and just continue the process of discussing with them, and at the same time, long-term arrangements on the actual MOU — Yukon's MOU — that's been signed off. We need to look at that as well, so that's what we're doing at the current stages.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, can I get a commitment from the Minister to provide me and potentially other Members of this House a briefing as to what work has been done to date and what milestones are put in place, as well as what possible hurdles they foresee that are stopping us from implementing this program before the end of summer?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, that was one of the goals of the department. There is a briefing that will be forthcoming to the committee, so they're aware of what progress we've made. Certainly, we'll be happy to present to the committee upon the completion of our session. We'll be gathering all the information and we'll certainly share that.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue to me, as the Minister knows. This is the second time I've raised this, and I want to stress this isn't just important to me; it's important to many employers in our city, as well as to our territory. I would ask the Minister that he take the commitment to communicate to the NWT Chamber of Commerce, as well as the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce, about his intention to move forward on this initiative. Therefore, if they want any feedback or concern, or at least just be included in the loop on this possible step by this department, I would encourage the Minister to commit to that, if he can.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, our department will continue to consult with those individuals that are meeting these challenges. One of them will be the Chamber of Commerce and other organizations that are interested. Our department is willing to share that, upon our sharing that with the committee. Mahsi.

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

QUESTION 203-16(2)
ACCUMULATED DEFICIT
AT STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, I want to continue in my line of questioning for the Minister of Health and Social Services. It gets back to the \$11.5 million accrued deficit that is currently at play at Stanton Territorial Hospital. I find it very disturbing to hear the Minister's comments that FMBS has been stepping in to assume responsibility for paying the payroll at Stanton.

Mr. Speaker, this \$11.5 million doesn't accrue overnight. It builds up over years. I'm wondering: what has the Minister done and what has the government done to address the deficit at Stanton Territorial Hospital?

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, I can advise the Member that the accumulated deficit at Stanton has occurred over the last two years. In the last fiscal year their deficit was \$5 million, and this year we're predicting it will be about \$6 million — that's over two years — so it hasn't been accumulating over many, many years. The government has been taking progressive steps to get to the reasons why so that the actions taken are in line with the issues at hand. I think we should be mindful of the fact that the authority provides very important health care services, and actions we take have to take into consideration the people that work there and the services we provide. I can also tell the Member that there will be a supplementary appropriation bill coming to this House where it will include an item to

address the accumulated deficit not only for Stanton but for all hospitals in the Territories.

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, I'm well aware that appropriation Bill 4 is going to be before the House. I wanted to ask some questions today about the \$11.5 million. I want to find out what the government's plan is to address that \$11.5 million. The Minister has said it herself: they do have a plan. I know what that plan is. I guess we'll leave it for further on in this session, to discuss that \$11.5 million in the government's plan. I do agree with the Minister: the hospital does provide a valuable service to the residents in the territory. I'm not debating that. I'm debating the management. I want to address the accountability that is lacking. I want to ask the Minister: how long has FMBS been paying the payroll at Stanton Territorial Hospital?

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, I believe FMBS has paid about 12 payrolls.

Mr. Ramsay: I'm not a mathematician, but there are 380 employees, or thereabouts, at Stanton. With 12 payrolls that's probably about six months' worth of payroll that the department has been paying. That's about \$20 million. How is this transaction recorded between FMBS and the authority? How does it appear on the books? And where is this \$20 million coming from?

Hon. Sandy Lee: I could get more detailed if the Member needs it, but my understanding is that the FMBS covers the payroll for the staff and for the authority, because we do want to make sure that everyone is paid. Then the amounts are marked as accounts receivable, and it is really a cash flow issue there.

Mr. Speaker: Time for question period has expired. I will allow the Member a short supplementary question. Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the Minister proposing that somewhere down the line the government comes forward with a supplementary appropriation for 20-some-odd million dollars to bail the hospital out in terms of what they paid in payroll for six months? How long is this going to continue to be allowed to happen?

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, we're not expecting that we will be coming forward with a supplementary appropriation for that amount of money. We are working on stuff that would deal with the \$11 million deficit, and at that time, I'm sure we could talk about some of the details.

I do appreciate that the Member is concerned about the accountability and the financial picture of the authority, and so am I, and so is the government. We have taken a number of steps to address that. The zero-based review is one of them. I have appointed a public administrator with a very broad

mandate to look at the details of the management or the programs that we're offering and what possible recommendations he could make. I have given him a three-month time frame to come back with that. I have discussed that with the standing committee. Whether it's the master plan, human resources plan, the deficit situation — there is a lot on the table that I am working on and that I am working closely on with the Standing Committee on Social Programs.

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

Written Questions

QUESTION 14-16(2)
MULTI-PROJECT
ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING AGENCY
(RULED OUT OF ORDER)

Mr. Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a written question for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. What is the status of the Multi-Project Environmental Monitoring Agency (MPEMA)? Is it up and running or non-existent?

Mr. Speaker: Item 9, returns to written questions. Item 10, replies to opening address. Item 11, replies to Budget Address, day 4 of 7. Item 12, petitions. The honourable Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

Petitions

PETITION 6-16(2)
WRIGLEY FERRY CROSSING

Mr. Menicoche: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition dealing with the matter of the Wrigley ferry crossing.

The petition contains 66 signatures of Nahendeh residents. The petitioners request that the Department of Transportation work to have the Wrigley ferry in service at the end of May so that the students of the Chief Julian Yendo School can participate in the track and field event in Hay River from June 4 to 6, 2008.

Mr. Speaker: Item 13, reports of standing and special committees. The honourable Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

Reports of Standing and Special Committees

COMMITTEE REPORT 5-16(2) STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE 2008–2009 DRAFT MAIN ESTIMATES

Mr. Menicoche: Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Government Operations is pleased to present the report on its review of the Draft Main Estimates for 2008–2009.

Since the 16th Legislative Assembly was elected in October 2007, the time frame of this transition year did not allow for full-budget circle review that would typically involve the review of business plans. Instead, the 16th Assembly approved an interim appropriation in February 2008, followed by a main estimate to be introduced in the May–June session. In an attempt to better align government expenditures with anticipated revenue, the GNWT proposed reductions for the 2008–2009 Main Estimates. The government also included strategic investments that should support the vision, goals and priorities set by the 16th Legislative Assembly.

The Standing Committee on Government Operations is responsible for the oversight of the departments of the Executive, Finance, Human Resources, and the Financial Management Board Secretariat.

The committee has met with Ministers between April 1 and April 8, 2008, to review the Draft Main Estimates for each of the departments in detail. During these meetings committee members repeatedly expressed their concerns regarding the government decision-making process leading to the proposed reduction and proposed elimination.

The committee felt that Members were not sufficiently consulted and provided with details to make informed decisions on how they proposed strategic investment and how they relate back to the vision, goals and priorities of the 16th Assembly.

On March 31, 2008, the Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning also received a briefing from the Minister of Finance, outlining the fiscal framework and the fiscal strategy of the government.

Reductions

Overall, the committee found that it's important to maintain fairness and consistency throughout all departments when looking for areas of reduction. The government has to find a balanced approach between position cuts and other operational cost reductions.

The committee is concerned that the reduction exercise focused too much on the elimination of positions, and instead more emphasis should have been placed on questioning how the departments conduct their day-to-day business.

Committee recognized that the departments look at their daily operations, seeking out opportunities to reduce and save expenditures for travel, materials and supplies. The committee feels that more could be done and encourages the government to continue seeking out cost savings in day-to-day expenditures; for example, exploring savings through bulk airline ticket purchases.

Mr. Speaker, I'll turn the rest of the report over to the Deputy Chair, Mr. Hawkins.

Mr. Hawkins: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche.

Department of Finance

Members of the Standing Committee on Government Operations met with the Minister of Finance on April 1, 2008, to review the Draft Main Estimates for the Department of Finance.

Committee members made note that the department is proposing to spend \$10,959,000 in operation expenses for the fiscal year of 2008–2009.

Committee members offer the following comments on issues arising out of the review of the 2008–2009 Draft Main Estimates.

Revenue Increase and Stabilization

Committee members found that in order to create long-term financial stability for the Northwest Territories, the government should not only look at reducing costs but also explore options for revenue increases. The committee suggested that the Minister look into the following options:

The creation of a heritage trust fund that would allow for progress in the negotiations about resource revenue sharing. Such a heritage, or trust fund, would generate savings for future generations. The GNWT could also transfer a portion of potential future surpluses into the trust. The trust fund model to be considered for this undertaking would be the Norway and Alaska.

Other members felt that the fluctuation and adjustments of the GNWT's revenues are too high and suggested the creation of a revenue stabilization fund. The goal of such a fund is to offset fluctuations in GNWT revenue from Canada, mainly grants; transfer payments; corporate income tax, CIP; and personal income tax, CIT.

The committee also encouraged the government to look into alternative means to generate revenue, like taxation of minerals and resources and the

introduction of a carbon tax, or changes to the fuel tax administration. The committee hopes that alternatives and new initiatives for revenue generation will be presented during the next business planning cycle.

Operations Review and Liquor Licensing Board and Liquor Commission

During the review of the Liquor Revolving Fund, members discussed the operation of the Liquor Commission and Liquor Licensing Board. Members suggested that the GNWT explore options to make the operations more efficient and consider alternative means for liquor control, licensing and distribution sales.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the government undertake the functional review of the operation of the Liquor Commission and the Liquor Licensing Board.

Financial Management Board Secretariat

The members of the Standing Committee on Government Operations met with the Minister Responsible for the Financial Management Board Secretariat on April 1, 2008, to review the Draft Main Estimates for 2008–2009.

Committee members made note that the secretariat is proposing to spend \$72,023,000 in operation expenses for the fiscal year 2008–2009 and \$7.5 million on capital projects in the fiscal year of 2008–2009.

The committee notes that these operation expenditures include the contribution to the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation operational budget.

The committee members offer the following comments on issues arising out of the review of the 2008–2009 Draft Main Estimates.

Audit Bureau

Given the oversight function of the FMBS in terms of business conduct of all GNWT departments, the committee is very concerned with the ongoing vacancy rate of almost 50 per cent of the Audit Bureau. The committee urges the government to address these recruitment and retention issues in a timely fashion in order to ensure that the internal audit mandate and function can be fulfilled. Necessary steps may include a review of how business within the Audit Bureau is conducted and if there are alternative means to fulfill the Audit Bureau's mandate and function.

Power Subsidy Program

Members expressed their concern about the rising costs of the Power Subsidy Program and urged the government to take measures to increase cost efficiency and improve the program delivery.

At this time, I'd like to pass the reading of the report on to Mr. Jacobson, the Member for Nunakput.

Mr. Jacobson: Thank you, Mr. Hawkins.

Department of Executive

On April 3, 2008, members of the Standing Committee on Government Operations met with the Premier to review the Draft Main Estimates for the Department of the Executive.

The committee members made note that the department is proposing to spend \$12,976,000 in operation expenses for the Executive offices during the fiscal year of 2008–2009.

The committee members offered the following comments on the issues arising out of the review of the 2008–2009 Draft Main Estimates: mandate of the functions of the Executive and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations.

During the review of the Department of Executive, the committee discussed the elimination of regional offices and re-profiling the remaining two offices in the north and the south regions.

Members recognize that the regional offices play an important role in relationship building and in communications with the aboriginal and the community governments. This function is also carried out by the intergovernmental relations division of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations, contributing to the committee's concerns about duplication of functions and mandates between the two departments. Furthermore, the devolution office, as part of the Executive, also deals with aspects of tri-governmental negotiations and relations.

Members are disappointed that no progress has been made in the negotiations with Canada on the resource revenue sharing and devolution. The self-government comprehensive agreement negotiations and the implementation of existing agreements are proceeding very slowly.

The committee also had concerns about capacity of the small, stand-alone Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations. Pooling resources together would enhance the capacity of the GNWT to proceed with these activities while operating cost-effectively. The committee felt that a number of senior management positions in the Executive would allow for absorbing the oversight

of the functions of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations.

Recommendations

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations be rolled back into the Executive.

New Proposed Approach to Supplementary Reserve Fund

Members also discussed the government's proposed new approach to future supplementary appropriations based on the reduction of the supplementary reserve fund from \$25 million to \$10 million. The committee is concerned about Cabinet's ability to enforce this approach and disallow future supplementary appropriations for non-emergency or non-foreseeable funding needs.

Effective and Efficient Government

Ideas and initiatives that would contribute to the goal of the 16th Assembly to create effective and efficient government were discussed during the meeting with the Premier. On several points Members stressed the importance of keeping the committee informed and engaged with the GNWT plan and new initiatives or major changes.

Reductions

Members also suggested that it's important to give any organizations outside the GNWT that are affected by the proposed reductions or cuts early notice of anticipated changes. Such an approach should be consistent throughout the GNWT departments and not depend on individual Ministers and preferences. Members were worried that the proposed cuts would affect the regions to a higher degree than offices at headquarters.

The committee noted that phase 2 of the family violence action plan is now entering its implementation stage and that the GNWT felt the family violence coordinator position with the Department of Executive is no longer required.

Mr. Speaker, I will ask my colleague the Member for Great Slave to continue. Thank you.

Mr. Abernethy: Thank you.

Department of Human Resources

The members of the Standing Committee on Government Operations met with the Minister of Human Resources on April 8, 2008, to review the Draft Main Estimates for 2008–2009.

Committee members made note that the Department of Human Resources is proposing spending \$32.264 million in operation expenses in

fiscal year 2008–2009. Overall, the committee felt that the proposed reductions focused too much on position cuts and not enough on improving business practices and streamlining efficiencies.

Regional Human Resource Services

The committee made it clear that position cuts should not disproportionately affect the regions. Members were concerned about the overall human resource capacity of the GNWT to service the regions, especially in the field of recruitment and retention for health, social services and education. The committee stated that the government must provide support to the regions, especially during seasonal hiring requirements; for example, teachers in the spring, community nursing pool, and improved physician recruitment for regional and community health facilities.

Affirmative Action Policy

Members pointed to the importance of ensuring that the public service is representative of the population it serves. The committee urged the government to consider the affirmative action status of incumbents when positions are proposed for elimination. The government needs to apply the Affirmative Action Policy and ensure that layoffs of aboriginal employees do not exceed their proportional representation within the GNWT's workforce.

Some of the priorities Members look forward to discussing with the Minister of Human Resources include the review of the effectiveness of the existing Affirmative Action Policy and the potential for replacing it with a new employment equity policy. Members were particularly concerned about the underrepresentation of aboriginal people in senior management positions.

Medical Travel Assistance and Dental Program Benefits for GNWT Employees

Members were very concerned about the steady increase in expenses for medical travel assistance and dental programs that are part of the benefits of GNWT employees. The committee recognizes that these expenditures are the biggest cost driver of the Department of Human Resources' budget. An analysis of cost drivers would be the first step. Members look forward to discussing the review undertaken collaboratively between the departments of Human Resources and Health and Social Services with the Minister.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the government look at alternative and more cost-efficient means to provide medical travel assistance and a dental program as a benefit to GNWT employees.

Maximizing Northern Employment Programs

Committee members were concerned about several reductions to Maximizing Northern Employment programs — in particular, cuts to graduate and summer student programs, the Graduate Transition Program, the Social Work and Teacher Graduate Programs.

Members fear that these reductions will have a disproportionate impact on smaller communities and the regions. The committee questions how the government will succeed in attracting young Northerners in the public service if programs with proven track records of success are being cancelled or reduced.

Given the demographics of the GNWT's workforce, succession planning and the development of a younger northern workforce are crucial steps toward future sustainability of the GNWT public service.

Capacity and Mandate of the Department of Human Resources

Members also expressed concerns regarding the department's capacity to fulfill its mandate and functions at the present time. The inherent backlog since the amalgamation of the human resource services of the GNWT is still not completely dealt with, and issues with the implementation of the Human Resource Information System took their toll on staff morale of the department and the overall confidence of GNWT employees.

The committee urges the government to look at ways to improve the everyday operation of the department and its financial and business planning and looks forward to discussing future improvements with the Minister.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the committee's Chair to continue. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Menicoche): Mr. Speaker, that concludes the report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations on the review of the Draft Main Estimates for 2008–2009.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Great Slave, that Committee Report 5-16(2) be received by Assembly and moved into Committee of the Whole for consideration.

Motion carried; Committee Report 5-16(2) received and referred to Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Menicoche: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to waive rule 93(4) and that Committee Report 5-16(2) be moved into Committee of the Whole today.

Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. Speaker: Item 14, reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 15, tabling of documents. The honourable Minister responsible for Justice, Mr. Lafferty.

Tabling of Documents

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the following document entitled Part 1 – 19th Annual Report of the Victims Assistance Committee of the Northwest Territories.

Document 55-16(2), Part 1 – 19th Annual Report of the Victims Assistance Committee of the Northwest Territories, tabled.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Item 15, tabling of documents. Pursuant to section 21 of the Legislative Assembly Executive Retiring Allowances Act, I wish to table the Legislative Assembly Retiring Allowance Fund financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2008.

Document 56-16(2), Legislative Assembly Retiring Allowance Fund financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2008, tabled.

Mr. Speaker: Pursuant to section 42 of the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, I wish to table the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories Members' Handbook.

Document 57-16(2), Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories Members' Handbook, tabled.

Mr. Speaker: Item 16, notices of motion. Item 17, notices of motion for first reading of bills. Item 18, motions. Item 19, first reading of bills. Item 20, second reading of bills. Item 21, consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, Bill 8, Tabled Document 37-16(2), with Mr. Bromley in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Okay. We have a number of issues before the committee right now. What is the wish of the committee? Mrs. Groenewegen.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is the wish of the committee today to begin with the Department of Human Resources for the Main Estimates for 2008–2009.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Any comments? General comments? Okay. No general comments at this time. Does the committee agree? Mrs. Groenewegen.

Mr. Menicoche: Call for a break.

Mrs. Groenewegen: It's not really my place. It's the prerogative of the Chair whether to call for a break or not. But general comments on the Department of Human Resources' Main Estimates would be the first order of business.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Okay. Apparently the normal procedure is to do general comments first, but I'm quite happy to take a break at this point in time, so that's what we'll do. We'll take a break.

The Committee of the Whole took a short recess.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole back to order for review of the Main Estimates for the Department of Human Resources.

MAIN ESTIMATES 2008–2009 DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Does the Minister responsible have any opening remarks or comments? Minister McLeod.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present the Main Estimates for the Department of Human Resources for the fiscal year 2008–2009. The department's 2008–2009 Main Estimates propose O&M expenditures of \$32.253 million. This represents an increase of \$662,000, or 2.1 per cent, over the 2007–2008 Main Estimates.

The department has reduced expenditures in areas such as travel, salaries, contracted services, and fees and payments, but the overall budget has grown due to collective agreement adjustments and increases to the cost of medical travel assistance.

The Department of Human Resources Main Estimates include funding for 167 positions. This is a decrease of four positions from fiscal year 2007–2008. One hundred and twenty of the department's positions are located in headquarters with the remaining 47 located in regional service centres.

As the Department of Human Resources continues to adapt to its role as a provider of support and services, the Government of the Northwest Territories is experiencing greater consistency in the management of its human resources. This is evidenced by across-the-board use of interdepartmental job evaluation committees, independent reviews of open competitions by contracted staffing review officers and ongoing labour relations training for supervisors and managers.

Gains have also been made in the areas of recruitment and retention of essential staff. In the 2007–2008 fiscal year the health recruitment unit

hired more than 150 health care professionals on a term or indeterminate basis. The growth of the casual nurse float pool by more than 150 nurses in 2007 reduced the GNWT's reliance on agency-supplied casual nurses by an average of 10 per day from the 2006–2007 fiscal year. This represents a reduction in agency nurse fees of 70 per cent, or \$1.5 million.

The government remains committed to building a strong public service that is representative of the population it serves. Each year hundreds of northern post-secondary students are given valuable and relevant work experience in the territorial public service. Staffing practices such as transfer assignments and under fills afford northern residents the opportunity to build on their skill sets and advance in their chosen careers.

Consistent management of our human resources and fair and equitable treatment of our employees are integral parts of an effective and efficient public service. This budget will help with the delivery of essential human resource services; the recruitment, retention and development of staff; and the provision of timely and reliable advice and support to all departments, boards and agencies in all communities of the Northwest Territories.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'd like to call on the chairperson of the Standing Committee on Government Operations, which has responsibility for reviewing the Department of Human Resources, to make comments on the committee's review of the departmental estimates. Mr. Menicoche.

Mr. Menicoche: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to turn the committee's attention to Committee Report 5-16(2), which was read into the record earlier today, and I'll provide our opening comments.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. What is the wish of committee? Is that acceptable to committee?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Does the Minister wish to bring in witnesses?

Hon. Bob McLeod: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you. Does the committee agree to bring in witnesses?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): May I ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to bring in witnesses. Mr. Minister, when you're ready, I'll ask you to introduce your witnesses.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With me I have on my left Sharilyn Alexander, acting deputy minister of Human Resources, and on my right I have Shaleen Woodward, the director of Human Resources Strategy.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you. Are there general comments on the departmental estimates by members? Mr. Menicoche.

Mr. Menicoche: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just with respect to general comments on the Department of Human Resources. It was when we were sitting with the Minister in the briefings that we tried to convey from the Regular Members' side that we had some grave concerns over some of the plans for proposed cost reductions. Particularly for me, I come from one of the regional ridings and am conveying that if there are going to be cost reductions that they be proportional to the regions.

One of the things is that because I've got a small riding of people in my community, I thought and I still feel to this day that my riding suffers a lot more reductions proportionately. That's something we tried to convey to the HR Minister as something to watch for. That is a concern.

As well, some of the other things that we discussed in our committee is the Affirmative Action Policy and that it really makes sense, Mr. Chairman, where if we are going to lay off and reduce from our workforce that it not be disproportionate as well, meaning that people that have jobs in their communities and regions should not be the first ones to suffer loss because they are there. They are in their home field, they've taken the time to get their training, to get their education, to get a good job to serve their people, and they should not be the first ones to be gone, because they are, I can tell you for sure, the biggest contributor to their community, to their region, to their families and provide lots of assistance and volunteerism to help all their communities run. That's something that should be first and foremost in HR's mind. We tried to convey that to them.

I think another important aspect, particularly at this time of year: we have a lot of northern students returning North and looking for work and that those jobs not be cut or reduced as well. Those students and part-time positions, Mr. Chairman, often don't show up in the Draft Mains — I don't know how they're accounted for — but they're a big component of the support system we have for our youth, for our adult learners, for our students that did take the time and effort to go out of the communities to learn and come back. We all know that providing them jobs in their communities or working for our government is a good way for our government to commend them, to give them a pat on the back and say, "Look, you're doing good, and

we'll support you wherever we can; we'll provide you employment for the summer to make money for the lean winter months," when students have to strive their darnedest.

It's just about supporting our expanding and growing workforce, Mr. Chairman. That's something that we as Regular Members have been continually stressing to the Department of Human Resources and really look forward to knowing that they heard us in this case. I'll just close my opening comments with that.

Mr. Ramsay: I'm happy to provide some opening comments under the Department of Human Resources. I welcome the Minister and his staff here with us this afternoon.

I do want to ask a number of questions when we get to the detail. One of the things I'm interested in knowing was what advice the Department of Human Resources gave to the government when we were dealing with the notification letters that went out to employees. I'd be very interested to know what the corporate take from HR was on whether or not those notification letters should have gone out in the manner that they did. Some of the blame, I guess, has been deflected back at the department for those letters going out, so I'd like to try to get to the bottom of that, if I could, at some point in time, Mr. Chairman.

The other thing I'm interested in is — and we had some discussions with the Premier and the Minister back in February when the reduction exercise was in play — what was the government doing in terms of hiring employees? Why was it taking so long for people who applied for positions to hear back from the department or hear back from anybody? In some cases, months would go by and they wouldn't hear anything. The Premier said in February that we're on a case-by-case basis; we're hiring on a case-by-case basis; we weren't hiring in certain areas. So these things are all a great concern to me and the people out there applying for jobs, obviously. I've got a number of questions in that area, Mr. Chairman.

I think we should look at more of a user-friendly approach to job competitions, Internet-based. I mean, most people have a computer nowadays, and we should go Internet-based so that people who apply for jobs have the ability to go online and check the competition status. They do this with the Government of Alberta. They have a system set up so that if you're an applicant, you know exactly where that competition is at in the process every step of the way. It makes it much more, as I said, user-friendly to folks applying on positions with the government.

I'm not too sure exactly what role the department plays. In my Member's statement earlier today I

mentioned the fact that there don't seem to be nursing positions available at Stanton, yet there are agency nurses there. I'm trying to figure out why we aren't increasing our indeterminate pool of float nurses instead of hiring agency nurses. I'm not sure where the department is on that and how they're working with Stanton or the Department of Health and Social Services on that.

A couple of other comments — and the committee spoke of it in their committee report — on affirmative action and not enough aboriginal people in senior management. That's a concern, I think, if you look government-wide. It's there, and we're not doing enough, in my mind, to groom the aboriginal people that we have working for us for senior management. It's obvious. This is a good example. If you look at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, there's not one aboriginal person in senior management there. If you look at their intergovernmental relations section, there's not one aboriginal person there, and that's shameful that the GNWT Department of Aboriginal Affairs wouldn't have one aboriginal person working in senior management or intergovernmental relations. It's ridiculous, really. So I think we need to address those areas.

To the department itself, what I see looking through the phone listings — again, I've said this before — there seem to be managers managing nobody. There are a number of managers with hardly any staff or no staff, and I don't know why that's allowed to happen. If you're a manager, you should be managing something, and that would have a staff component with it as well. Specifically the client service managers: who are those managers managing? Themselves? That's not to poke fun at them or say that they're not doing anything. I'm sure that they provide a valuable service, but why are they managers, and why have we got six managers in that client services area with six staff?

Those are some pretty fundamental questions, Mr. Chairman. I've got a number of those as we get through the detail. I'll certainly be asking a number of questions. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. General comments.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to provide a few general comments on Human Resources and the Minister's opening remarks. I always have a concern with the number of people who are in HR headquarters. I look at 120 people in headquarters and 47 out in the regions. To me that just seems like there are too many chiefs and not enough of us. I have a great concern with that.

One of my favourite things back home when I'm talking about this is I'll tell people to go on the

government directory and go into the HR site. You go into there and you find an Employer of Choice department. I have no idea what they do. Mr. Ramsay said they provide a service. I'm just not sure what it is. I see nine people in there. Total Rewards Planning, another department that I really don't know what they do. I see they have 18 people in there, so you're looking at 27 people. I have a concern with that. To me it just seems like too many of the functions of HR are being centralized to headquarters in Yellowknife, and I have a real concern with that.

Mr. Ramsay spoke to the number of managers. I've always had a concern with that too. I look at one department where every name there is a manager. I'm not sure, as Mr. Ramsay said, what they manage. To me it seems like when you're given the title of manager, obviously you're given the pay of a manager. It seems like there's just too much at headquarters. I was trying to do the math here. We've got 4,700 employees in the public service. We've got 167 people in HR. That works out to roughly 25 to 28 people per person at HR. That just seems to be a fairly high number, in my opinion.

I've always got concerns. I got an e-mail from someone who left the Northwest Territories probably about two years ago who's still looking to get their pay. Whatever they had coming, they were still waiting for. They sent me the e-mail. They cc'd a couple of other people, and they got some results probably a little quicker than they normally would have. There was another e-mail from another person who was concerned about some pay that they had coming. Again, working with the Minister we were able to get that resolved fairly quickly.

The point I'm trying to make is that these folks shouldn't have to resort to sending their MLAs e-mails wondering where their pay is and their ROEs. I think that was one of the issues that one of the folks had. With this many people in headquarters, this many people in HR, our public service shouldn't have to be waiting forever. I know students who work during the summer who three-quarters of the way through the school year still hadn't received their final pay.

So I have a real concern, not just with HR but with most departments, that too many of the positions are in headquarters — too many. I mean, if you look at the overall size of the public service, you're looking at probably over 50 per cent of them in headquarters. I understand that Yellowknife has close to 50 per cent of the population of the Northwest Territories, but still, that doesn't justify having all the positions in headquarters.

You talk about cuts. I see a reduction. You know, we're talking reduction exercise, reduction exercise. But one of the first sentences in the Minister's opening remarks is the word "increase": increase by

2.1 per cent. It seems to me like that's going against what we're talking about here. We're talking reductions, and I kind of agree that some reductions were needed. We're talking reductions, but reductions where? Reductions out in the communities.

You look at Inuvik. We're losing 34-plus people. That's reductions. I mean, we've lost enough people to make up for a couple other places. The problem I had with this whole reduction exercise right off the bat — other than being told by constituents that they got an affected employee letter, but that's a different story all unto itself — was that I was afraid the people making the decisions to reduce were going to start down here. They were going to work their way from the regions up to headquarters, and when you get here, you realize we've already almost made our quota, so we don't have to eliminate so many people at headquarters. Four. I see four. I see an increase of 2.1 per cent, an increase of \$678,000. That kind of money could have probably kept Arctic Tern going for another year, half a year.

This is the first department we're doing. I hope this is not a sign of things to come, where every department that's going to come before us — when we're talking reductions all the time — the first word in their opening remarks is going to be the word "increase." That kind of defeats the whole purpose of this particular budget when you talk reductions, and we're still increasing. We're still getting bigger, and I have a serious concern with it.

I probably will have more questions to the line by line as we go along, because I did commit to going through this whole budget document yesterday. I did commit to going through it line by line and asking as many questions as I can, deleting whatever I think could be deleted, and that's the route that I intend to go with all departments. So thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to make a few opening remarks on the Minister's general comments.

Mr. Abernethy: Mr. Chair, in listening to the Minister's statement, I see that he's indicated that there's been a decrease in four positions, which is technically true, but there were actually five positions eliminated as part of the reduction exercise, all in Yellowknife, and then there was one position created in Fort Smith. So, technically, five positions have been eliminated as part of this reduction exercise.

I'm not as upset or as disturbed by the elimination of these five positions, as they were all vacant. I'm more concerned on a territorial level about eliminating positions where there are actually people in them. So as far as getting rid of vacant positions goes, I'm not as concerned.

Areas that I do have some questions about — and I'll be asking some questions later. You've identified five positions you're eliminating, but you've also reduced service levels in a certain number of areas — specifically around Maximizing Northern Employment, in areas of program workshops for grads, the Graduate Transition Program, as well as social work and teacher placement. I'm curious, given our strategic plan in supporting Northerners and maximizing northern employment, getting Northerners into northern jobs, whether or not those areas are necessarily the areas we would want to be cutting.

One position you're eliminating does concern me more than the rest, and that's specifically the nurse educator mentor position. In the Premier's budget address he talks about expanding the nurse practitioner training, reducing wait time through a one-time \$1.8 million investment, and increasing on-the-job training for the Community Health Nurse Development Program. I'm curious how you can be expanding things like the Community Health Nurse Development Program when another department, Health and Social Services, has indicated they're cutting the pot for the Community Health Nurse Development Program significantly, and the Department of Human Resources, which is responsible for administering the program, is getting rid of the nurse educator mentor. So I just want some clarity on that and to know whether or not the elimination of that nurse educator mentor is going to adversely affect the delivery of the Community Health Nurse Development Program.

As we dig through, there are some other areas that I'd like to ask some questions on, but I'm good for now.

Mr. Beaulieu: Mr. Chair, a lot of my concerns with HR are in the area of supporting and monitoring. Initially, when the Department of HR was created, the worked that was being done I assumed was going to be work that was going to provide monitoring and support to the small HR units that were in each department. But as it turns out, we've created a fairly substantial Human Resource division, as indicated in the Mains, of 167 employees, which is down from last year.

In some of my questioning that the Minister could be prepared for, I would like to talk about some of the self-service issues surrounding the self-service that is being employed by the government now and maybe paid for by HR but administered by some support services as well.

However, self-service doesn't seem to be a really good system that is effective. I know that it is one program that frustrates the people working for the GNWT. As a manager it's very difficult to keep track of employees. As an employee it's difficult to make sure that you're getting paid for the hours you've

worked. If you're a shift worker and something happened to run through a long weekend, I think you have to report that as either having been there or you don't get paid automatically, if you work through a holiday and stuff like that.

So self-service seems to be something, I suppose, that was initially designed to save the government money or save time or whatnot. The government had a really simple system. There's one form you fill out and you send in to your manager. It's signed, and someone could actually keep track of what it is that you're doing, where you're going, whether or not you're on holidays or duty travel or whatnot. But the self-service system is apparently not very clear to a lot of people who are trying to serve themselves.

I'm curious about whether or not the Department of HR is involved in human resource plans of other departments, what types of plans are in place and what type of support this department provides to other departments: job description writing, evaluations, job descriptions, and so on and so forth.

I'm curious about the position of the department in relation to the Affirmative Action Policy with all the other departments. I'm curious about training: cross-cultural training for people working in predominantly aboriginal communities and what type of cross-cultural training is provided to them.

The final thing is that we're changing the financial information system again. I'm not sure if that's directly related to HR, but the financial information system is another area. If it's in this area, I'd be asking questions on that and the high cost of replacing that system, which I'm assuming is failing the government. That's all I have for now. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. General comments? I'm hearing no further general comments. Does committee agree that we proceed to the detail of the estimates?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): We'll defer the summary on page 2-51 and proceed to the detail with the information item on Active Positions, pages 2-52 and 2-53. Any questions? Ms. Bisaro.

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wondered if I could find out how many regional offices there are for HR. I thought somebody had told me that there was only one in Fort Smith, but if I could have that confirmed, please.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Mr. Chair, we have seven regional offices in the Northwest Territories.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Other questions? Ms. Bisaro.

Ms. Bisaro: Thanks. I guess just to follow-up: are there human resources services in each of those regional offices?

Hon. Bob McLeod: Mr. Chair, we provide human resource services out of all of the offices. Some may not provide as many services as others, depending on the location. Generally, the larger regional centres are full service, but the smaller ones may not be as full service.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Minister McLeod. Mrs. Groenewegen.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. At headquarters are 120 indeterminate full-time positions. I'd like to ask the Minister if the core business of the Department of Human Resources could be managed with less than 120 people in headquarters. What process was undertaken by his department to determine whether more positions at headquarters could be reduced, or were they just responding to targets that were given to them externally?

Hon. Bob McLeod: Mr. Chair, I guess the best way to respond to that is that I think the number of positions at headquarters goes up and down depending on the staff that we have at the regional level. As much as possible, we like to have the services provided at the regional level, but on occasion we have staff who leave, and it takes some time to replace them, so that has impact on the headquarters level. As far as the reductions go, I think the approach that we took, our first cut at it, was to look at the vacant positions that we had in the department. That's how we approached it.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Mr. Chairman, certainly in fairness to the people who work there.... Looking at the vacant positions, I agree with this, but I don't think that's going far enough. I think, again, it comes back to this issue of program review and looking at the effectiveness and efficiency of the methods by which we deliver those programs. One hundred and twenty people in headquarters is a lot of positions. I guess I'm just concerned about doing things the same old way and kind of status quo, and when a reduction target comes up, it's not looked at in that in-depth way that a program review or maybe an outside objective set of eyes would look at the path that's performed. Maybe I am not doing a very good job of describing this.

It doesn't seem like people from within the department themselves would necessarily have any incentive or motivation at looking at how they could do the same function and do it with more efficiency and less people. I mean, what incentive do people have to do that? So we get an external target reduction and you say, "Oh, we've got some vacant

positions; let's offer that up." That seems very shallow to me. In the Alberta government they used to have one deputy minister, who had a nickname, who would go around and be put in a department and look for every efficiency possible. People knew that when that deputy came to their department, they were looking at streamlining operations and saving money.

I don't know if it would take something like this to get those kinds of results. I mean, as a Member I'm all about wanting to do things in a cost-effective and efficient way, and what I'm seeing here, very much, is the status quo.

Can the Minister provide me with any assurance that he as a leader and being at the helm of this department has any creative or innovative ideas of how the Department of Human Resources could be better managed?

Hon. Bob McLeod: Certainly we have a number of different approaches we would like to take. What we are starting to realize is that it's becoming harder and harder for us to staff HR positions with people with HR backgrounds. We are finding we have to spend more time in training. We want to focus more on working with the departments that have the delegated authority to hire. So we want to work more closely with them so we provide better service levels. We had to pull some services that were done at the regions into headquarters in order to deal with some processing problems or issues. We want to spend more time on training and developing capacity so we can put those services back out into the regions.

We also agree with the Member. We want to do a review of the workload and positions within the departments in the regions to assess if they're located in the right place and doing the right things and if we have enough people to do the jobs they would have been asked to do.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Mr. Abernethy.

Mr. Abernethy: Thank you. My question is similar to the one that Mrs. Groenewegen just asked. Specifically, I am interested, actually, to hear some examples of the types of things you'd try to do to streamline the organization to find some efficiencies. There are large organizations out there with far more staff than the GNWT, and they run their organizations in such a way that staff get paid on time, labour relations are dealt with in a timely manner, and training and development is seen, recognized and delivered. Succession planning's a reality.

I am not saying those things aren't a reality with the GNWT, but we have a very large HR unit compared to some of these large international and national corporations. I'm wondering if there's been any research done into sound business practices on

how best to deliver human resource services and find those efficiencies and increase productivity within the organization itself. This is without necessarily resulting in additional job cuts within the department itself but maybe reorganizing or restructuring a little bit so we're able to provide services in a timely and effective manner. Specifically, if you can walk us through some of the best practices you guys have been researching in order to find greater efficiencies.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Minister McLeod.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess we've been looking at it from a number of different ways. I don't want to go back in history, but we do have the Hackett report, where we looked at all of the areas we were functioning in to see what we could improve on.

We've also looked at self-servicing. I guess we see that as a way to improve services to reduce the number of people we need to do the job. We're finding that we're having to run competitions quite a few times in order to be able to attract people to come to work for the Government of the Northwest Territories.

This is an area we're looking at, that we're putting focus on, and we've been able to reduce the time it takes to fill a competition from ten weeks to eight weeks.

There are a number of those areas we're looking at. Certainly, with the change in demographics, not only in the Northwest Territories but, I guess, all across Canada and the world, we find that we need to change the way we recruit and staff so we can attract younger people to come to work for the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Seeing no further questions on pages 2-52 and 2-53, we'll move to our first votable item. Sorry, Mr. McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: Mr. Chair, the decisions to decide which employees were to be potentially affected within HR — and this is a question I'll probably ask each department. Who made the decisions as to which employees would be affected employees? Who made that decision?

Hon. Bob McLeod: We had targets, and we asked the management to identify the positions. We were working under the direction that we were to minimize person-year reductions as much as possible. So we decided we would use vacant positions to fill our reductions for the Department of HR.

Mr. McLeod: The Minister is telling me they were given a target — I'm assuming it's by Cabinet — to meet the reductions. The Minister also said they

decided to just go with the vacant positions. So I'm to understand there were absolutely no filled positions within HR that were affected. Am I correct?

Hon. Bob McLeod: That's correct.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Minister McLeod. Follow-up, Mr. Robert McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I find it kind of odd that we propose to eliminate 135 positions from GNWT territory-wide, yet not one person in HR is affected other than vacant positions, which don't mean much because they're vacant anyway. So, actually, HR didn't lose anybody, other than vacant positions. We still sent out letters to 135 affected employees. I think any percentage that our public service goes down by, HR should automatically go down by the same amount.

That was just a comment, Mr. Chair. There was no question there.

Hon. Bob McLeod: I just wanted to clarify that although there may have been vacant positions that were put forward for reductions, the resources that were used to fund those positions would be removed from the HR budget as well.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Minister McLeod. Yes, Mr. Robert McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just one more. I would like to ask the Minister if those four vacant positions that were terminated and that really had no effect on anyone because they were vacant, as I said.... I'd like to ask the Minister if there were more positions that were maybe put forward for reductions but not accepted.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Yes, there were some positions that were put forward from the regions, but they were not accepted for reductions.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Minister McLeod. Any further questions on the active positions? Mr. Robert McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for that, Mr. Minister. One word I heard that struck me right away was "regions." My next question: were these vacant positions or were these filled positions? How many were from the regions and how many were from headquarters?

Hon. Bob McLeod: There were seven in all.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Minister McLeod. Any further follow-up on these two pages? On active positions? Mr. Abernethy.

Mr. Abernethy: I just want to follow up on that question, Mr. Chair. Seven total were proposed; five were accepted? Does that mean two of them

were from the regions and they weren't accepted, or does that mean that seven additional ones were proposed and not accepted?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. Clarification, Minister McLeod.

Hon. Bob McLeod: That were seven additional that were not accepted.

Mr. Abernethy: Seven additional positions that were identified and rejected? Were they vacant or filled positions?

Hon. Bob McLeod: Three of the seven were filled positions.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Any further questions on these two pages? I'm hearing none. We'll move on to our first votable item, on 2-55. Under Human Resources, Operations Expenditure Summary, \$705,000, under Directorate. Let me repeat that: under the Directorate, Operations Expenditure Summary, \$705,000. Agreed? Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is perhaps the appropriate place to ask some questions, considering the directorate provides leadership and direction to the department and is under the authority of the Minister. Getting back to the notification letters that went out to the affected employees, I want to get a better understanding of what advice the Department of Human Resources gave to the Minister and gave to Cabinet that would see those letters go out. Was the advice to send the letters out or not send the letters out?

Hon. Bob McLeod: I'm not sure what letters the Member's referring to, Mr. Chair.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Minister McLeod. This question seems to be beyond the estimates, here. Mr. Ramsay?

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll try to keep the question related to the estimates that are before us. The letters are the notification letters that went out to employees.

When we're talking about the Main Estimates, Mr. Chairman, we're talking about a reduction in staffing. Fundamental to that was the decision to either send the letters out or not send the letters out. The question I have for the Minister is: what advice did the Department of Human Resources give to the Minister and, in effect, Cabinet to either send the letters out or not send them out? That's germane to the whole discussion we'll be having here for the next three and a half weeks.

Hon. Bob McLeod: The department put forward a position that was supported by the union — recognizing that there are 5,800 employees that were concerned about the discussions on budget

reductions that we took to Cabinet recommending that we provide early notification.

Mr. Ramsay: We're all interested in this reduction exercise that took place and the notification letters that went out to employees. Between the time the letters went out and Regular Members actually found out exactly which positions were being impacted and affected — it took approximately three weeks to find out. Mr. Chairman, my question for the Minister is: why did it take three weeks? What was happening in that three-week time frame? We were left answering calls and concerns from our constituents in that three-week time frame without any knowledge of what was happening. I'd like to know what was happening during that three-week time frame, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. We are getting into an area that's probably more appropriately addressed during question period, but I will allow the Minister to respond if he wishes.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I understand the Premier already addressed this and provided a response at a number of meetings with the standing committees. He also talked about it yesterday in question period. I think that would be sufficient.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Minister McLeod. I'm not going to decide for anybody what's sufficient here. But I'd say, and I repeat, it's probably more appropriate in question period.

Mr. Ramsay: I'm not going to challenge your direction, Mr. Chairman; however, if the answers were sufficient, we wouldn't be asking questions in this forum. It's your prerogative, and perhaps we will ask those types of questions in question period.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): I'll go to Ms. Bisaro. Again, questions on the Main Estimates here.

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to ask a question relative to the Other Expenses item listed for the '08–09 Main Estimates. There's a significant jump from the '07–08 Revised Estimates. It is a similar amount to the Main Estimates from '07–08. Under the details of the expenses, fees and payments are \$302,000. Can I get an explanation of what those fees and payments are used for?

Hon. Bob McLeod: The main change to the Revised Estimates is because of the technical service centre chargeback adjustments. That was the main reason for the change.

Ms. Bisaro: I just wonder if I could get the amount of the TSC chargeback, please.

Hon. Bob McLeod: The total amount of the chargeback to HR is \$628,000.

Ms. Bisaro: Considering the fees and payments total is \$302,000, is that referencing the total for the whole of the department or just for the directorate? It kind of doesn't make sense.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): A reasonable question, Ms. Bisaro. Mr. McLeod.

Hon. Bob McLeod: I guess I should have been more specific. The \$628,000 is part of HR; \$270,000 is the part that's here in the directory. The remainder is in HR strategy and policy.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): I'd like to go to Mr. Abernethy next.

Mr. Abernethy: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You may have answered it, but I just may not have understood or heard it properly. In the 2006–2007 actuals under Fees and Payments you had \$545,000. In the Main Estimates for '07–08 you had \$302,000, but your Revised Mains were quite a bit lower than that. They were \$117,000. This year you're coming back with exactly the same amount as the previous year's Mains under Fees and Payments. Can you tell me the history there? Because I see that it gets high, then goes down, then drops to the Revised Mains, and now you're putting it back up to where it was next year. Was there a reason that it dipped that year, or is this an area that maybe we can look at for reductions? What were the fees and payments for, and why did they dip last year?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Ms. Woodward.

Ms. Woodward: Mr. Chair, there was \$244,000 taken out of the Human Resources Strategy and Policy part of the revising of the TSC chargeback system. When they were originally put together, we didn't have all of the funding required for the TSC chargeback departmentally. So we've been taking that money from different areas. What we have done in this case for the fees and payments is put up that number slightly to better reflect the chargeback that is required for this department, so although there is a total of a \$628,000 TSC chargeback overall, we're paying for part of it out of the directorate. You also see the remaining amount coming out of Human Resources Strategy and Policy.

Mr. Abernethy: So the increase is mostly around the TSC chargeback area. It wasn't growth — was it — that increased this area back up to \$302,000? You found it from within.

Hon. Bob McLeod: That's correct, Mr. Chair.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Any further questions on Operations Expenditure Summary? To recap, under Directorate, Operations Expenditure Summary \$705,000. Agreed?

Department of Human Resources, Directorate, Operations Expenditure Summary: \$705,000, approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Information item. Any questions on the next two pages, Active Positions under Directorate?

Moving on, we're on page 2-59, Human Resource Strategy and Policy, Operations Expenditure Summary, \$4,855,000. Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Under the Human Resource Strategy and Policy what policies were used when the government was conducting its reduction exercise and targeting positions government-wide? I'm just wondering what policies were put in place or what policies were used in determining whether or not a position should be reduced.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Mr. Chair, it was up to the individual departments to determine the best approach and identify potential reductions for review at Cabinet level.

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Chairman, in the absence of a comprehensive human resource strategy or plan government-wide, I'm just wondering again how the government could make decisions in the area of staffing without a model to follow and how it is that they could just rely on deputy ministers and departments to come back with possible reduction scenarios. That's got to contravene some type of policy. It contravenes good judgment; I know that. But it's got to ring some alarm bells somewhere when we don't even have a comprehensive human resource plan for the future and we're out there hacking and slashing positions. So, again, I'd like to ask the Minister that.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Mr. Chair, I think it's important for the Member to recognize that the responsibility for management and dealing with human resources is held jointly with the departmental senior managers. The departments have been delegated authority to do all of the hiring and staffing, and the Department of HR provides services to departments. So, as such, the departments have authority to make those kinds of decisions, and we provide services and facilitate the human resource functions.

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Chairman, I thank the Minister for that. Under the title "Quality Assurance — Monitors and evaluates human resource services and activities to ensure delivery supports effective human resource management. Provides guidance and feedback on human resource processes and procedures." I'm wondering: how was quality assurance employed when it came to the staffing reductions that the government is embarking upon?

Hon. Bob McLeod: We would ensure that the different aspects of staff retention and layoffs were adhered to, and proper notification and so on.

Mr. Ramsay: Did the Department of Human Resources work with each department in the area of quality assurance to ensure that each department was following through on the human resources procedures and processes that are in place to ensure they weren't contravening any policies, Mr. Chairman?

Hon. Bob McLeod: I wouldn't say it was quality assurance that did that. But the HR department did work with senior management of different departments so we could identify potentially affected employees.

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Chairman, some of the stories that Members have heard — and, again, we waited three weeks to actually get any information from the government in terms of the positions that were being impacted. I'm just wondering how that could happen. How could it take three weeks for the government to let Members know which positions were being impacted?

Some of the stories that Members have heard from constituents, where they're put into a situation where it's every man for himself or every woman for herself. There are three positions left in a shop and there are four people there, so somebody.... It's like playing human resources spin-the-bottle or whatever to see who's left standing at the end of the day. To me, that's just not a humane way to go about a reduction exercise. There are a number of these stories out there, Mr. Chairman. Also, there are stories out there where departments, if left to their own devices, are going to go after people they don't like or after people they've had run-ins with in the past. There are examples of that out there.

Again, I'd like to ask the Minister what he has done to ensure that every possible scenario was covered in this so that that type of scenario doesn't play itself out. I know it has played itself out, so obviously we've failed somewhere, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Mr. Chairman, all of these scenarios that the Member refers to we deal with on the basis of a merit principle. As such, that guides the staffing approach that is taken, and it guides our staff retention and any provisions for layoff. The senior managers of departments have delegated authorities.

If there are specific instances that the Member is aware of where staff weren't dealt with properly or were mistreated, then we certainly would look into it. But I'm not aware of any of those circumstances.

Mr. Abernethy: Mr. Chair, this question is going to sound an awfully lot like the last question. In the '07-08 Mains you had a total budget of \$716,000

under Contract Services and \$458,000 under Other. Under Contract Services your Revised Mains are \$116,000 lower, yet this year you've come back to the full amount of \$716,000. Under Other you're at \$458,000. You dip down to \$207,000 by way of the Revised Mains, and now you're back up to \$368,000. Granted, we don't have previous years, so we don't see much of a trend here, but why did these numbers dip in the Revised Mains and why are we putting them back up? Is there an opportunity for some cost savings here by way of keeping the contract services and the others lower than you are currently projecting?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you. Ms. Woodward.

Ms. Woodward: Certainly a couple of things are going on, and you are correct in that it is related to the other issues around the TSC chargebacks. We have a requirement departmentally to pay I believe it was \$628,000 in TSC chargebacks. Some of them do come out of Human Resources Strategy and Policy, so between the two areas we are trying to get that allocation up so that we can fully pay for our TSC chargebacks. Again, this wasn't a matter of supplementary funding or forced-growth funding. It's us trying to line up what our spending requirements are for things like TSC chargebacks within the budget.

The other area that is changed a bit in here — and that's specifically with the upgrade last year — is that we took \$500,000 out of the operating budget of the department and moved it over into capital to pay for some of the costs associated with the upgrades that were not funded otherwise. So that \$500,000 is a big part of the dip that you see.

Mr. Abernethy: The TSC upgrade is included in this budget line — the contract services?

Ms. Woodward: TSC chargebacks or...? Sorry; I didn't understand the question.

Mr. Abernethy: Not the TSC upgrades; I apologize. The HR system upgrade. Are there ongoing costs related to that upgrade, and is that included as part of the \$716,000?

Ms. Woodward: The upgrade which occurred in the last fiscal year.... As part of that funding in the last fiscal year, we were required to fund some of that internally. The entire project is characterized as a capital project, and because we needed to provide some additional funding to that project, we took \$500,000 out of our operating funds for this division and moved it over into capital. So that's the dip that occurred. There is a request that we've made to transfer approximately \$82,000 that was remaining in terms of capital funding to complete some of the issues related to the upgrade, this fiscal year primarily being the final rollout of e-recruitment.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Ms. Woodward. Follow-up, Mr. Abernethy.

Mr. Abernethy: I'm actually slightly changing tacks here if that's all right. I'm looking at your budget. For your compensation and benefits in this section it's about \$2.3 million. There's been no position change in this area at all, yet when I look at vacant positions under HR Strategy and Policy, I see a business systems analyst that has been vacant for seven months, the manager of human resource information systems which has been vacant for two years and a policy officer which has been vacant for a year. In light of the reductions and finding ways to avoid laying off staff, were any of these three positions considered for layoff or elimination purposes in an effort to decrease the overall budget?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. Just a reminder to people that we're not supposed to be referring to documents that are not before the House, at least not extensively. Moving on to the response, Mr. McLeod.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Mr. Chair, of those three positions that the Member referred to, one was filled by an intern, the other one was used for filling a position through a contract and the third was an unfunded position where there are no resources available for it so that position would disappear.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Nothing further, Mr. Abernethy? Moving on, Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Chair, my question is in regard to human resources strategy but also on the policy side. This department is now responsible for ensuring that the policies that we do have are implemented but, more importantly, dealing with the Affirmative Action Policy. With these cuts that are taking place, a large number of aboriginal people are being let go, yet as a government we're somewhere just under 40 per cent of aboriginal employment in this government. I think we have a policy that clearly states that we're supposed to do what we can to ensure we have a reflective workforce and, more importantly, to try to get more people into the workforce, especially aboriginal people.

In regard to the cuts, two areas where we've seen the biggest impact on aboriginal employment are Transportation and Justice. I'd just like to ask the Minister: exactly what does his department do to ensure that we minimize the number of aboriginal employees that are going to be cut so that we don't decline our numbers into a worse-case scenario than what we are right now? We're not even coming close to meeting our goals of trying to have a representative workforce and having more aboriginal people in the public service. I'd just like

to know: was that policy followed when these cuts took place by way of job cuts?

Hon. Bob McLeod: Mr. Chairman, as a government, the Affirmative Action Policy is still in place. We followed all of the aspects of the Affirmative Action Policy. Of the potentially affected employees, the majority of those were non-aboriginal employees. Conversely, when we were looking to reassign potentially affected employees, we applied Affirmative Action Policy so that if there are two people of equal skills and experience, that position would be offered to a P1 candidate.

Mr. Krutko: In regard to the layoffs themselves, the numbers I came up with.... There are about 60 individuals who are going to be laid off in the two areas that I mentioned, in Justice and in Transportation. There are a few forestry jobs, but most of those are contract positions. I'd just like to know if you have the actual number of aboriginal employees who are going to be eliminated under these job cuts.

Also, how much would that decrease our affirmative action numbers in the workforce? You mentioned the majority of people are not P1 positions, yet 60 people in the public workforce is a lot of people in regard to P1 candidates. Again, especially in the area of Justice and Transportation, a lot of these people probably won't be able to work themselves back into the public service because of those so-called skills that they follow — in regard to transportation. More of them are dealing with marine operations and also in regard to airports. But the other one dealing with Justice is more on Corrections, and again, those are two areas to fill. In those other positions you are going to have to probably retrain them to put them in another job setting.

Do you have the numbers in regard to individuals we are talking about? Also, what does that do to the percentage of affirmative action candidates in this government?

Hon. Bob McLeod: The affirmative action statistics for the Government of the Northwest Territories has been flat-lined at 31 per cent for probably the past six or seven years. I think that of the potentially affected employees.... You have talked about Justice. There are 46, and they are split evenly between P1s and P2s, so my expectation is that in applying the Affirmative Action Policy, most of the P1s that are mobile I expect would likely be reassigned. The 31 per cent has been pretty.... It hasn't moved very much, so I expect it would probably remain around that on this, unless we take other steps to increase it.

Mr. Krutko: Since the Minister touched on steps, one of the issues I hear quite a bit from aboriginal employees who are in the public workforce is they

are trying to enhance themselves, go back to school and take training, go to university, you know, get their doctorates, get their different degrees to basically move them up the ladder. But there seems to be a lot of reluctance from people from within the administration to see aboriginal people succeed and be able to be the bosses of their bosses. I think there is a threat out there that people are afraid that by moving these people up the workforce ladder, eventually they might take over their jobs. I hope that's the intention of this government — that aboriginal people will someday through self-government, through running programs and services, be able to manage programs and services in the field that they are in. I find that in this day and age people almost have to quit their jobs to go to school. We shouldn't have that.

I'd just like to ask the Minister in regard to the area of developing our human resources: what incentives are there to ensure that those numbers on affirmative action — numbers where you're saying they're staying at 31 per cent.... If you look at the bureaucracy as it is structured, there are very few aboriginal people in management positions, senior management positions, and a lot of these positions that we put out in the newspaper in regard to so-called policy specialists are earmarked for university students in the south. They know that they are developing these job descriptions for people that aren't even here. I think that as a government we have to do a better job in that area.

I know the Minister touched on it. So since he touched on it, I'd just like to ask his response in regard to the question.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Mr. Chair, this is an area that's, I guess, a difficult one to deal with, because you would expect that, for not only aboriginal people but also for Northerners, they would get educated through the education system and then they would be able to get a job with the government and work their way up through the ranks.

But my experience with the civil service is that if you want to get aboriginal people into senior management or management, you have to take extra steps, because not everybody wants to go into management. If they want to go back to school.... Most of them have families, and so you have to make some arrangements to try to accommodate them. I think that generally you're looking at trying to accommodate them at 60, 70 per cent of their salary to go to school.

Those are the kinds of arrangements you would have to make, and with the budget situation getting tighter and tighter, it gets more difficult to do that. Then how do you do it so you're not seen to be playing favourites? Those are the kinds of things that you have to deal with, and you have to have a real commitment to make it happen.

Mr. Krutko: If the Minister can get information on the aboriginal affirmative action statistics in regard to the 31 per cent — what the implication of that percentage is going to be, and with the number of P1 and P2 layoffs, and exactly where they are. Can he provide us that information before we conclude this department?

Hon. Bob McLeod: We can provide most of that information probably today. We just have to make copies of it.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Chairman, I want to get back on to questioning the Minister in regard to the role that Human Resources played in the rollout of the staffing reductions.

From what I gathered from the Minister, departments were left pretty much to their own devices. Maybe he could explain to me a little bit better: how exactly was the Department of Human Resources involved in the decisions that departments made in staffing reductions? Were they involved at all? Or were departments, like I said, just left to their own devices to come up with their own reductions, take them to Cabinet? Is that what happened? Or were any of the reductions run by Human Resources?

Hon. Bob McLeod: The Department of Human Resources was involved in the discussions with the other departments. It was not a requirement for HR to give their stamp of approval on any proposed reductions.

Mr. Ramsay: If the department is responsible for the legislation and the policies and procedures that govern Human Resources, you know, as a corporate entity, the GNWT, then it would just make sense to me that, you know, whether it's a stamp of approval or not, the proposed staffing reductions see the experts at Human Resources to make sure they pass some kind of test, whether they pass the procedures and policies that are in place — or the government just rushes out and does what they want.

Again, I think what's happening, Mr. Chairman, is I'm getting a picture that this reduction exercise wasn't well thought out. If they didn't run it past Human Resources, then who did they run it past? Themselves? I think they at least owe it to the employees to run it past Human Resources first.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. I'm not sure if there was a question there, but Mr. Minister.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The departments have been delegated authority to do staffing and recruitment. So, as such, they have the authority to do that.

Mr. Ramsay: That begs the question: why do we even have a Department of Human Resources, then? Maybe we should just have a department of labour relations or something. If it's all being delegated back to the departments, what are we even doing here, Mr. Chairman?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. A somewhat rhetorical question, but Minister McLeod.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think it's important for the Member to understand that the Department of HR is a service department. The departments make the decisions on hiring and staffing. We provide service. We give advice and recommendations, and that's the whole purpose of the Department of HR.

Mr. Ramsay: Did the Department of Human Resources give any advice or recommendations to Cabinet prior to Cabinet making the staffing reductions? Mr. Chairman, I think that's the crux of my question.

Hon. Bob McLeod: In terms of the positions to be reduced, those were put forward by the departments. Of course, HR put forward their own reductions. It was our responsibility to make sure that those affected were dealt with properly.

Mr. Ramsay: I didn't really hear a response there. It's pretty much a yes-or-no question. Did Human Resources give Cabinet advice and recommendations on the staffing reductions? Yes or no?

Hon. Bob McLeod: The discussion's in Cabinet.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Anything further, Mr. Ramsay? Nothing further? I had Mr. Abernethy on the list next, but since he had talked and we're running out of time here, I appreciate his holding off. We'll go to Mr. Jacobson.

Mr. Jacobson: Mr. Chair, getting back to my colleague Mr. Krutko's questions in regard to being reassigned, in the smaller communities what choice will they have in trying to keep their job available? Or would they be given another chance elsewhere?

Hon. Bob McLeod: Our experience with the staff retention policy is that if there's no suitable job for an individual in their home community, they could look at jobs in other locations if they're mobile and willing to move.

Mr. Jacobson: I just really want to stress that the job cuts in the smaller communities.... Families are not always willing to move and are unable to. It just really puts them.... A really pretty bitter taste, I guess, in the GNWT workforce in the communities if they're just cut like that. But I'd like to see this

affirmative action. If the Minister could just make sure that the smaller communities that are being affected — that the opportunities are given to them.

Hon. Bob McLeod: We have the Staff Retention Policy. The whole reason for having that is to try to keep affected employees with the government, and the Affirmative Action Policy applies to that as well. So we'll take every step to try to keep those employees and reassign them.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Nothing further, Mr. Jacobson? We'll move on to Mr. Hawkins.

Mr. Hawkins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question is for the Minister of Human Resources. It's linked back to his opening remarks, but it's only a reference to put relevance around it, because I want the exact wording when I ask my question.

The Department of Human Resources' Main Estimates includes funding for 167 positions. Mr. Chairman, I need to reference that, because it's clear as to how many positions they fund. For my clarity, or maybe the Assembly's clarity, how many positions are there in total that are on the books or not on the books? How many funded positions are there in total within the Department of Human Resources, including the unfunded on-the-books positions?

Hon. Bob McLeod: There would be 167 funded positions.

Mr. Hawkins: I've been led to believe that a number of unfunded positions exist. Their titles may not be before me, if I could describe them as temporary positions, floating positions, you know, of that type of nature. I've been led to understand that some of the positions being kept unfilled; in other words, funded positions that are left vacant are being left on the books in order to fill those positions. Could the Minister provide some guidance and light on that observation?

Hon. Bob McLeod: Right now, as of March 31, the department had 153 indeterminate employees, nine term employees and 19 casual employees for a total of 180 employees. We've hired casuals to help us address a number of long-term problems for the department. Specifically, we've formed a backlog team to work on reducing the backlog within the department and also to fill in for employees who are on various forms of leave, be it maternity, paternity or otherwise.

Mr. Hawkins: My first question in this area, just to be clear, is: we have 167 positions, as cited by the Minister, but it sounds like we're actually running 180 positions, if I understood that. How is he funding the over-and-above 167 positions that get us to the 180 number? Just to be clear, that's approximately 13 positions.

Hon. Bob McLeod: We are funded for 167 positions. So at various times, people that are on leave without pay or what have you — we have to fill in behind them. So that's how we would do it. We are expected to come in under budget or within budget.

Mr. Hawkins: I've been led to believe that a number of these positions have been left vacant for quite some time, as this is a funding principle or practice of this department. Could the Minister speak to that and offer some clarity?

Hon. Bob McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can speculate — because I wasn't there. As the Member may be aware.... I think he was he was around when the Department of Personnel was blown up and the people from the department were hired off to the different departments. Their budgets were reduced by 25 per cent and the departments were told, "Well, you guys can be more efficient, so you don't need as much money." It came back to haunt the formation of the Department of HR, because none of the departments were willing to give any more than they had received from the centre. As such, with the amount of resources that were available, a lot of the positions were funded at 75 per cent levels. So that was part of the issue. A number of positions were eliminated, because it was felt the department wasn't adequately funded.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Chairman, following this example and formula I would say it's obvious that Human Resources must be the shining example of government if they're able to fund a heck of a lot fewer positions than they have. Maybe other departments need to take note of this formula, for some odd reason, because if you can be funded for 167 but still employ 180, there seems to be something really interesting going on. I'd like to know why all 180 aren't on the books, first of all.

Secondly, I've looked over a list of filled and vacant positions, and I was sure I saw more vacancies than 15, as the Minister had suggested. I think he said there were 152 positions filled, with some terms and whatnot.

So, again, I just want to see further clarity on this, because it seems odd. Why don't we have them all on the books if they're needed, and how do we keep funding them? It's of my mind that when people are migrated into a central department, many of them who were managers — who are no longer managers — would have been red-circled at their existing pay level.

I just don't see how they can afford to pay people properly if this is as it is. I'm not a detective, but I can see that something's missing here, and we're missing some real detail.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Part of the explanation is that when HR was amalgamated, HR wasn't allowed to lay anybody off. So, as such, we had more people.

I think the Member has to understand that just because you have positions, it doesn't mean that those positions are funded. We are funded for 167 positions, and there are 37 vacant, unfunded positions, so there are positions on the books, but there's no money or resources attached to them.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Anything further, Mr. Hawkins?

Mr. Hawkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I only speak for myself in a context that's hypothetical, but I know that if I were the Minister of Human Resources, I would fight to get them on the books.

I would find it odd. I think we're challenged, as Regular Members on this side, when we hear that you're funding unestablished positions — in the formal context, when I call it that — and we're not funding them properly. One could then beg to argue, "Well, if you can get by at a certain percentage short, why can't everyone else get by?"

I just find it odd that these positions aren't on the books, and I'd like to know why. For us to get the real picture of what's happening over there, I think it also starts with the fact that we should know how many people are truly in that department, and then it falls out as to how are we paying them.

As I said — more tongue in cheek — this is a shining example. It seems to be an example that we're shuffling resources in order to pay people that aren't on the books. I don't think that's right. That's not a good practice of showing our true accounting.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Would the Minister like to respond?

Hon. Bob McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I explained, I'm not saying it's right, either. I'm just saying that when positions were transferred into the amalgamated Department of HR, they weren't fully funded. A lot of them were funded at 50 per cent; a lot of them were funded at 75 per cent. In order to fund some of the positions that were at the top of their pay level, we couldn't afford to fill some of these positions, so they're vacant positions with no funding attached to them.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. I wonder if Mr. Hawkins would hand over one last question, being mindful of the clock here. You have 12 seconds left if you insist on going forward.

Mr. Hawkins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My last question for the Minister at this time is: would he provide the details of every single position that's in Human Resources so that we have it amply clear

on how they're funded? The Minister did note that some positions are funded, I would assume, properly, which is at the normal 100 per cent, but he cited that there seem to be positions not funded properly.

As well, could he provide the detail as to every single position, whether they're term, a ghost position, whether they're real or not real? I want to make sure all these positions are accounted for properly. If he could provide that detail, that would be splendid.

Hon. Bob McLeod: We can provide that information. I think the Member should be aware that as a government we go through a regular exercise of trying to stay on top of the unfilled, vacant positions. Some are set up for administrative reasons. It's an issue that we have to constantly update.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Minister McLeod. Again, we're running out of time for the day. Does the committee wish to rise and report progress?

Mrs. Groenewegen: Mr. Chairman, I would like to move that we report progress.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Motion is in order, not debatable.

Motion carried.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): We will rise and report progress. I would like to thank the Minister and his witnesses.

Report of Committee of the Whole

The House resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Could I have the report of Committee of the Whole, please, Mr. Bromley.

Mr. Bromley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your committee has been considering Tabled Document 37-16(2), Main Estimates 2008–2009, Volumes 1 and 2, and Committee Report 5-16(2), Standing Committee on Government Operations Report on the Review of the 2008–2009 Draft Main Estimates, and would like to report progress.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. A motion is on the floor. Do we have a seconder for the motion? The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

Motion carried.

Mr. Speaker: Item 23, third reading of bills. The Hon. Minister of Justice, Mr. Lafferty.

Third Reading of Bills

BILL 4 MISCELLANEOUS STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Sahtu, that Bill 4, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2008, be read for the third time.

Mr. Speaker: Bill 4 has had third reading.

Motion carried; Bill 4, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2008, read a third time.

BILL 7 SECURITIES ACT

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Thebacha, that Bill 7, Securities Act, be read for the third time.

Mr. Speaker: Bill 7 has had third reading.

Motion carried; Bill 7, Securities Act, read a third time.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Clerk, item 24, Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Clerk of the House (Mr. Mercer): Orders of the Day for Wednesday, May 28, 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) Replies to Budget Address (Day 5 of 7)

12) Petitions

13) Reports of Standing and Special Committees

14) Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills

15) Tabling of Documents

16) Notices of Motion

17) Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills

18) Motions

19) First Reading of Bills

Bill 9: Supplementary Appropriation Act, No. 4, 2007–2008

20) Second Reading of Bills

21) Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

Bill 8: Appropriation Act, 2008–2009

CR 2-16(2): Standing Committee on Government Operations Report on the Review of the Report of the Auditor General on the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation Public Housing and Homeownership Programs

CR 3-16(2): Standing Committee on Government Operations Report on the Review of the 2006–2007 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner

CR 4-16(2): Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning Report on the Review of the 2008–2009 Draft Main Estimates

CR 5-16(2): Standing Committee on Government Operations Report on the Review of the 2008–2009 Draft Main Estimates

TD 37-16(2): Main Estimates 2008–2009, Volumes 1 and 2

22) Report of Committee of the Whole

23) Third Reading of Bills

24) Orders of the Day

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until Wednesday, May 28, 2008, at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 6:02 p.m.

