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The Honourable Tony Whitford, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Wednesday, February 19, 2002****Members Present**

Honourable Roger Allen, Honourable Jim Antoine, Mr. Bell, Mr. Braden, Mr. Delorey, Mr. Dent, Mrs. Groenewegen, Honourable Joe Handley, Mr. Krutko, Mr. Lafferty, Ms. Lee, Mr. McLeod, Mr. Miltenberger, Mr. Nitah, Honourable Jake Ootes, Mr. Roland, Honourable Vince Steen, Honourable Tony Whitford.

ITEM 1: PRAYER

HON. JIM ANTOINE: (translation not provided)

SPEAKER (Hon. Tony Whitford): Thank you. Please be seated. The next item is item 2, budget address. The honourable Minister responsible for Finance, Mr. Handley.

ITEM 2: BUDGET ADDRESS

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of the 14th Assembly, Members of this House laid out our vision for the Northwest Territories. We committed to work together toward a vibrant, prosperous and unified territory of which all Northerners can be proud. Since then, we have been building the foundations to make the vision expressed in *Towards a Better Tomorrow* a reality. As the 14th Assembly enters the second half of its term, it is time to ensure that the foundations are level and the framework is appropriate for us to take the next steps in building our vision.

As our Premier, the Honourable Stephen Kakfwi, stressed in his address to the people of the Northwest Territories last month, "We can, and we will, complete the tasks we have set out for ourselves in our vision."

Over the last two years, we have worked hard to ensure that the Northwest Territories benefits from the growing demand for our resources. We are seeing the benefits in economic terms. Our economy is strong and more opportunities are opening up for Northwest Territories' residents and businesses.

It is time to assess our accomplishments and to evaluate our goals and priorities. We have made some critical investments in the development of the Northwest Territories including:

- developing a strategy to maximize northern employment;
- creating a literacy strategy;
- initiating the development of a social agenda;
- developing a transportation infrastructure strategy; and
- developing and implementing a non-renewable resource development strategy.

However, the achievements that are bringing the benefits of economic growth are also producing pressures -- pressures such as housing shortages, demands on community infrastructure and social and environmental concerns. We need to continue our efforts to promote economic growth and prosperity but unless we do so in a manner that balances economic development and sustainable growth, we risk building our vision on an unstable foundation.

This budget is about maintaining that balance. We need to balance revenues with expenditures, to balance economic investments with social investments and to balance resource development with environmental protection.

We must address social issues, the need for community infrastructure, and the northern cost of living. We must also undertake initiatives to protect our environment, to foster our traditional economy and to protect our identities and cultures. We must focus on initiatives that support growth in small communities as well as in the major centres. We must ensure that our healthy economy benefits all Northwest Territories residents.

This budget lays out our strategy for making crucial investments in strengthening our social fabric and in developing our economy within an environment of revenue uncertainty. This budget confirms our commitment to our vision.

Mr. Speaker, in developing our budget plan, we listened to the concerns of Northerners. This budget responds to the recommendations and proposals put forward by the Members of this Legislative Assembly, by Chiefs, by community leaders, by non-government and business organizations, and by individuals. Because money is limited, choices are involved. This budget cannot respond to all the needs that have been identified but must have a balance. We believe that we have achieved this balance.

This budget is about building on the foundations we have laid down in the first two years of our mandate. It is about building, together, our vision of a better tomorrow.

Economic Review and Outlook

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to report on our territory's robust economic performance last year. We estimate that real gross domestic product grew by close to 32 per cent in 2001. This dramatic growth demonstrates a remarkable level of economic activity that includes massive increases in investment and substantial contributions from exports and consumer spending.

Exciting things are happening in the diamond and natural gas industries, two of the Northwest Territories' fastest growing economic sectors. Diavik estimates that close to \$700 million of the almost \$1 billion spent on goods and services so far in the construction of the Lac de Gras diamond mine were purchased from northern businesses. Oil and natural gas exploration and related activities were also engines for economic growth, with activity concentrated in the Mackenzie Delta, Fort Liard, Norman Wells, and Cameron Hills regions.

Exports grew by an estimated 19 percent in 2001. The biggest contributors to the increase came from diamond shipments and natural gas deliveries. Diamond production from the Ekati mine

was much higher than the previous year and the most prolific wells in the Fort Liard area provided a full year's production in 2001.

Marketing efforts are paying off for the fur industry. Indications are that the substantial growth experienced by the industry in the 1999-2000 season is continuing.

Tourism makes up an important part of the Northwest Territories' economy. Last year over 39,000 visitors spent approximately \$41 million in the Northwest Territories. Although the number of visitors has dropped following the events of September 11, we expect tourism to start to grow again in 2002.

We estimate that consumer expenditures grew about 9 per cent in 2001, as increased economic activity put more money in people's pockets. This figure is supported by the fact that retail sales grew by over 10 percent in the first 11 months of 2001.

Unemployment rates in the Northwest Territories have fallen from almost 14 percent in early 1999 to 9.8 percent last month. Currently, our employment rate is the highest in Canada.

-- Applause

Increased employment opportunities for Northwest Territories residents have lessened dependence on social assistance. Northwest Territories' social assistance payments have fallen consistently since 1999.

Our strong economic performance in 2001 resulted from a very large increase in investment. Although we are not expecting the dramatic economic growth of 2001 to be repeated in 2002, we do expect our economy to remain stable. On balance, the Northwest Territories' GDP should grow approximately 2 percent in 2002.

Mr. Speaker, our economy has impressive potential.

The Northwest Territories' second diamond mine at Diavik's Lac de Gras site should be producing early next year, and a third mine proposed by De Beers Canada at Snap Lake is entering the regulatory review process. These projects require hundreds of millions of dollars in capital investment and employ hundreds of people.

Recent developments give us additional confidence that the Mackenzie Valley pipeline will be built. Following two years of intensive lobbying by our government, the Mackenzie Delta Producers Group and the Mackenzie Valley Aboriginal Pipeline Corporation announced last month that they intend to spend between \$200 and \$250 million over the next three years to undertake project definition. This work will include the preparation of a pipeline application, with a submission expected in 2003. Current projections are for natural gas production by 2008. This is a very positive signal and we look forward to working with northern communities and industry to prepare for the project.

The performance of our economy has been impressive in recent years. The developments on the drawing board confirm that the Northwest Territories is on the road to becoming a "have" jurisdiction.

Fiscal Review and Outlook

Mr. Speaker, I also have good news to report on our fiscal position. Since my last budget, the GNWT has benefited from some good financial news, improving our short-term fiscal situation.

Last year at this time I forecast an operating surplus of \$23 million for 2000-2001 and a balanced budget for 2001-2002. Our situation has improved since then.

2000-2001 Year End Results

Our 2000-2001 year-end financial results show a \$118 million operating surplus. A year ago, we knew we were going to benefit from a one-time increase in corporate income tax collections but since then, we have also resolved an outstanding formula financing issue with the federal government, which added almost \$60 million to our 2000-2001 revenues.

2001-2002 Update

I am also pleased to announce that in the current fiscal year, 2001-2002, the GNWT has benefited from an additional large increase in corporate income tax collections. As a result, we should have revenues of \$985 million and close 2001-2002 with an operating surplus of \$160 million.

-- Applause

2002-2003 Outlook

Mr. Speaker, without additional one-time corporate tax collections, we expect our revenues to drop in 2002-2003 to \$856 million, while operating expenses will increase to \$868 million, leaving us with an operating deficit of \$12 million.

Operating expenditures are budgeted to be \$64 million higher than the current year's main estimates. This is a substantial increase and reflects both the need to keep pace with higher costs and greater program demands and the need to make critical investments in our economy, in our communities and in our people.

Longer-Term Outlook

Mr. Speaker, I would like to turn to our longer-term fiscal outlook. We have been very fortunate over the past two years in that revenue increases have provided us with significant operating surpluses and made it unnecessary for us to borrow.

These revenue increases have allowed us to make some important investments and meet many needs that we would otherwise have been unable to address without significant federal cost sharing. However, they have not changed the longer-term picture. In the long-term, our revenues will not likely be sufficient to maintain current expenditures and investments unless some fundamental changes occur. Consequently, Mr. Speaker, while we will invest a portion of these one-time revenue increases in economic and social initiatives, we must set aside a portion to finance projected future deficits.

In fact, without the benefit of one-time revenues or increased federal investment, revenues in 2003-2004 could be \$67 million less than in 2002-2003. This would result in a \$118 million

operating deficit in 2003-2004, falling to \$78 million the following year. If this occurs, these deficits will bring government borrowing close to our authorized limit of \$300 million by late 2004-2005.

Fiscal forecasting is challenging and difficult in the best of times. While there is relative optimism, there is some uncertainty about the Canadian economy and how it will affect our revenue forecasts. The GNWT depends on the formula financing grant for much of its income. Future growth in the grant depends in part on growth in provincial government spending and on the state of the Canadian economy. It also depends on our own economic performance and the growth in the Northwest Territories' population. Finally, we expect that resource development will begin to generate significant revenues in the next few years, which will not accrue to northern governments until devolution occurs. These circumstances make fiscal planning over the medium-term a challenge for this government.

Fiscal Strategy

Our fiscal strategy, Mr. Speaker, must be about balance. Our strategy must allow us to balance revenue capacity with spending needs. It must allow us to continue the necessary investments to lay the groundwork for future economic development while paying for services that Northwest Territories' residents need now.

Our fundamental fiscal strategy has not changed. The strategy I outlined last year was based on some important assumptions:

- economic development will continue;
- northern governments will achieve devolution; and
- Northerners will benefit from resource development.

We were prepared to borrow to finance economic development initiatives and to mitigate any negative social impacts of large-scale development. We were prepared to seek an increase in our borrowing authority to make the investments to ensure Northerners benefit from the economic activity that is coming to the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, in spite of projected deficits in future years, now is not the time to abandon our strategy to build future prosperity. While these projections mean that we must re-examine some investment plans, we must still invest to the extent that we can. We will be using a portion of our one-time revenues to fund these investments. We remain committed to making the investments today that will provide economic benefits for Northwest Territories residents in the future.

Further, while our focus on economic matters must continue, we also need to take immediate action to address issues such as the high cost of living, the affordability and availability of housing, the adequacy of the social safety net, and the need for more community infrastructure and services. It is important that our decisions benefit small communities as well as the larger ones.

More than ever, we need federal investment. As major pipeline development becomes more certain, the federal government must make the commitments that match their responsibilities for resource development. We are prepared to work with the federal government, aboriginal leaders and their governments

and industry to make the necessary investments and to create the environment that will encourage economic development.

We still need to find a long-term solution to our highway and other transportation needs. The investment strategy to develop our highways will continue, despite delaying plans for a highway trip permit fee. However, the rate of investment will be slower until we find new revenue sources.

We are moving forward on other key issues. Formal negotiations on devolution with the federal government and aboriginal governments will begin soon through the Intergovernmental Forum. We expect significant progress by the end of the term of this government in 2003. We are also working closely with the Aboriginal Summit to ensure that post-devolution arrangements will provide the means for Northwest Territories governments to meet the needs of their citizens.

The ability to generate revenues from natural resources will provide all territorial governments with greater flexibility to offset government costs associated with resource development and to promote economic growth and development without onerous reliance on user fees. Furthermore, it will reduce our dependence on the federal government. In the meantime, the formula financing grant remains an important source of funding. Preliminary discussions for renewal of the formula financing agreement have started.

Progress continues to be made in negotiating self-government arrangements. An agreement was signed last year to create the Salt River Reserve. An agreement-in-principle was recently initialled in the Beaufort-Delta self-government negotiations. A final land, resources and self-government agreement with the Dogrib First Nation is close to a reality.

Implementation of self-government will create the need for different funding arrangements and we are prepared to address this. The federal, territorial and aboriginal governments need to work together to ensure that long-term financial arrangements create fiscally strong territorial and aboriginal governments.

In the post-self-government Northwest Territories, government programs and services will be delivered by different governments and in different ways in different regions. The arrangements to finance programs and services must be workable, sustainable and consistent. Fiscal arrangements must provide adequate funding and must include appropriate incentives to encourage economic development.

The GNWT recognizes the need to fully prepare all regions to assume greater responsibilities for making the decisions that affect their lives. To address this, we will concentrate our existing resources in a way that supports the building of capacity throughout the Territories. The GNWT is committed to completing self-government agreements that include plans to build capacity for all Northwest Territories residents.

The Intergovernmental Forum has proven to be an excellent means of formalizing the government-to-government-to-government relationship between Northwest Territories aboriginal governments, Canada and ourselves. There is no other process like this throughout the country. Through the Intergovernmental Forum, we are making progress on key issues of concern to all governments in the Northwest Territories, including economic development, capacity building, devolution and resource revenue sharing.

Mr. Speaker, our fiscal strategy is a work in progress. We will continue to work with other governments to ensure long-term fiscal arrangements are sustainable and we will continue to evaluate our spending and investment decisions to ensure balance with our revenues over time.

Initiatives

Support for Economic Development

The responsible development of the Northwest Territories' resources requires that governments strike a clear balance between the economic benefits of development and the longer-term goals of environmental protection and eco-system health.

We have heard people throughout the Northwest Territories stress the importance of a balance between the environment and the economy. Residents say "We want jobs. We want business opportunities and growth to continue. We want new revenues for aboriginal and public governments. But we also want clean water, clean air, unspoiled land, and healthy fish and wildlife." We can have both, but we need the checks and balances in our decision-making that will reconcile these goals.

These checks and balances will come, in part, from how we organize ourselves to manage our resource development and environmental protection responsibilities. We also continue to be guided by the recommendations of the Economic Strategy Panel in their report, Common Ground. The recommendations in Common Ground provide a balanced approach to moving the Northwest Territories towards economic self-sufficiency. The investments in this budget in support of this balance implement a number of the Common Ground recommendations.

Environment

All of us understand the need to protect our environment.

In response to growing community concerns about industrial activity and community growth, this budget provides nearly \$1.4 million to enable our government and communities to ensure that the environment is protected. Initiatives funded in this budget include:

- adding regional response and enforcement capacity;
- cumulative effects monitoring;
- gathering baseline biophysical data along the Mackenzie Valley in anticipation of a gas pipeline;
- environmental contamination clean-up;
- holding an Elders' Workshop on Climate Change; and
- continuing implementation of the protected areas strategy.

All of these actions must be taken in co-operation with aboriginal governments.

Work that began last fall on our Energy Strategy continues. We anticipate having a draft strategy available for public consultation during the summer of 2002. The objective of this strategy will be to define the Northwest Territories interests in energy and understand energy consumption patterns in our communities and how we can most economically provide

environmentally friendly energy. The strategy should identify new energy management initiatives in addition to the Renewable Energy Incentive Program begun in 2001-2002.

Non-Renewable Resource Development

Mr. Speaker, a cornerstone of the GNWT's vision for a prosperous future is the development of our resources for the maximum benefit of Northwest Territories' residents and businesses. Development will not occur unless Northwest Territories residents fully participate and benefit from that development. Almost two years ago, this government took stock of the economic potential of the Northwest Territories' mineral and oil and gas resources, and developed a blueprint for promoting, managing and benefiting from the development of these resources. The Non-Renewable Resource Development Strategy continues to guide the GNWT in its investment decisions and we continue to urge the federal government to participate in funding the strategy. This budget proposes substantial investments in support of the strategy -- in business development, in training, and in infrastructure.

We developed this strategy in response to a request from the federal government. The development we predicted has occurred. Meaningful federal investment is overdue.

This government is committed to ensuring that Northwest Territories businesses and workers benefit from the development of our natural gas reserves and the construction of a Mackenzie Valley gas pipeline. This budget includes \$1 million to support the Mackenzie Valley Development Project. This funding will be directed toward projects such as community-based entrepreneurial training, promotion of secondary value-added oil and gas industries, and natural gas conversion in Fort Liard.

As well, we will allocate over \$1 million to increase capacity in regional offices.

The recent agreement between the Mackenzie Valley Aboriginal Pipeline Corporation and the Mackenzie Delta Producers Group on equity participation in a gas pipeline is an example of meaningful Northwest Territories participation in development. This agreement is a solid, respectful business partnership -- a partnership where each partner accepts the risks and rewards associated with investment in the gas pipeline.

The Mackenzie Valley Aboriginal Pipeline Corporation is a new business model for aboriginal governments. It brings those with settled claims and economic resources together with those who are still striving towards these results. It is a worthy endeavour, whose success will mean prosperity not only for its shareholders but for the entire Northwest Territories. For these reasons, it merits government support and commitment. If the federal and territorial governments can share the vision, the vision can become reality. We will continue to provide support to the Mackenzie Valley Aboriginal Pipeline Corporation and accept a fair share of the financial risk if the corporation is successful in securing federal government financial commitments to backstop its participation in the Mackenzie Valley Gas Pipeline.

Mr. Speaker, oil, gas and minerals are not the only resources of the Northwest Territories that have the potential to yield major economic benefits and result in large-scale developments. For

the past year, we have been researching the hydroelectric potential of the Northwest Territories' river systems. Almost every region possesses significant hydroelectric potential that regional aboriginal governments may someday choose to develop. The Dogrib First Nations have already taken this initiative. The government is ready to work with and support any region interested in researching their hydro potential and to help address the related economic and environmental questions. Funding to support this research is provided for in this budget.

Roads and Infrastructure

Mr. Speaker, last year I announced this government's intention to undertake an ambitious program of investment in the Northwest Territories' highway system. We proposed to invest \$100 million over four years to upgrade territorial roads. Much of the work proposed was needed to cope with the ever-increasing effects of resource development traffic, to improve safety and to stimulate economic growth and expansion.

To finance the strategy, we proposed the introduction of a highway trip permit fee on commercial trucking in the Northwest Territories. The fee was not our first, nor even our second choice for raising the needed funding. Our first choice was to convince the federal government that it should reinvest some of the growing resource revenues they were raising in the Northwest Territories. Our second choice was to find ways to finance these highway investments from general government revenues. However, health, education and other critical social demands on scarce government resources take higher priority.

As Members are aware, Mr. Speaker, while almost everyone agrees that our roads urgently need an investment of this magnitude, many people expressed concern over the impact of the proposed fee on the cost of living in the North. As a result of the many concerns we heard, the government chose not to proceed with the highway trip permit fee legislation last session. We were prepared to give Northerners time to develop and propose alternatives.

This will not change our goal to improve our highway infrastructure through the use of Northwest Territories businesses and workers. Not only is an upgraded highway system necessary to ensure the safety of the travelling public, it is an essential element for resource development and economic growth in the Northwest Territories.

The current fiscal position of the GNWT enables us to make some one-time capital investments in the existing territorial highway system. I am pleased to announce that a \$33 million highway investment is proposed in this budget for 2002-2003, including \$2.5 million to upgrade access roads.

-- Applause

That is \$15 million in new money.

Not only will this investment provide the needed funds to preserve the existing essential infrastructure and facilities, but it will also be distributed across the highway network to improve highways linking communities and residents of the Northwest Territories.

The government is pursuing alternatives to pay for needed highway improvements and is actively engaging stakeholders in the process of identifying the best means of funding highway

infrastructure. The Department of Transportation is supporting the Northern Business Coalition, which is led by the NWT Chamber of Commerce and includes a number of other territorial stakeholder organizations, in their lobby effort to seek federal investment in Northwest Territories infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, population, industry and traffic have all increased dramatically in the North Slave region. Interest rates are attractive. We are exploring the possibilities suggested through the Fort Providence Betterment Corporation's proposal to build a bridge over the Mackenzie River at the Fort Providence crossing.

-- Applause

This proposal calls for some federal equity contribution, the dedication of Northwest Territories ferry and ice road savings, and an ongoing contribution from the beneficiaries of a bridge - the people and businesses of the North Slave Region. The proposal has the potential to serve as a template for partially financing regional infrastructure investments that would otherwise not be made. If we can find a workable financing model, its application throughout the Northwest Territories may allow substantive protection of, and improvements in, regional transportation infrastructure.

Traditional Economy

Mr. Speaker, we recognize the very important economic benefits of large-scale resource development, if balanced with appropriate environmental protection. We have also heard from chiefs and other leaders, and we recognize the need to find a balance between large economic projects and the community level economy. A key component of this balance is enhancing the traditional economy, which includes fur harvesting, arts and crafts and cultural tourism. Elements of the traditional economy are especially appropriate for smaller communities. This priority was emphasized in Common Ground, which recommended support for the traditional economy, a clear regional development strategy and promotion of on-the-land programs for young people. The Honourable Jim Antoine, Minister of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development, will be implementing a number of initiatives to support this priority.

The GNWT is providing \$265,000 in new funds to implement the revised Northwest Territories Fur Strategy and to provide youth training programs in trapping. New investment will be made to support traditional tanning skill development, improve pelt quality, train trappers, maintain the fur marketing effort and monitor the fur-bearing population. We expect our efforts in strengthening and securing our capability for harvesting and marketing furs to meet the high expectations for northern furs already established in the marketplace.

In response to the Common Ground recommendations, the GNWT will provide \$150,000 in this budget to establish a stakeholder committee to develop an arts policy and strategy for the Northwest Territories. This budget also contains new funding for research into traditional methods of arts and crafts production and to identify product development and marketing.

Support for Business

To ensure that our businesses can take full advantage of the opportunities generated by economic growth, we need to ensure they have access to adequate levels of investment capital. The GNWT has invited a number of Canadian bankers

and representatives from the northern business community to review this issue. The Bankers' Commission will identify gaps in service and provide practical recommendations aimed at improving access to capital for northern businesses.

Healthy local businesses support strong communities. We are providing \$275,000 in new funding for new investment and economic initiatives to complement current government initiatives that support local businesses. This new funding will be focussed on development of the arts and crafts industry, promotion of the tourism industry and participation in trade shows.

As well, the NWT Development Corporation will receive \$750,000 in additional funding to meet increased demand for financial support for small businesses. These and other initiatives will maximize business opportunities for northern communities. We expect this to provide spin-off benefits for northern communities.

Support for Communities

Mr. Speaker, the initiatives I have outlined so far support economic development for the benefit of Northwest Territories' residents. However, we must recognize the need to balance this support with initiatives that will help residents cope with the pressures that change and economic development bring, particularly in community development, housing, health, education and social issues.

Capital Investments in Communities

Community governments have not been immune to the economic and social impacts of recent resource development activities. Pressures have been felt on community water and sewer infrastructure, community roads, social programs, rental housing and even municipal staff recruitment and retention. The government has recognized the needs of many of our small communities and is responding.

In 2002-2003, we will be investing \$13.8 million in capital expenditures in the smaller communities of the Northwest Territories; \$4.5 million alone will be invested in water treatment and sewer facilities. This \$13.8 million includes other investments for building and upgrading warehouses, storage facilities, workshops, schools, health centres, offices and housing in various communities.

We are also providing \$3.4 million in funding for small community infrastructure through government contributions.

Northern Employers Benefits

Mr. Speaker, this budget proposes an ongoing increase of \$1.7 million in contributions to community governments and housing associations to offset benefit costs. This funding will help communities maintain their ability to recruit and retain staff and to cope with the recent increases in the costs for both employers and employees for participation in the pension and insurance programs offered by the Northern Employees Benefits Services Pension Plan.

Community Recreation and Sports

Sport activities promote healthy lifestyles within communities. The Honourable Vince Steen, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, will be announcing \$1.4 million in initiatives

for improving recreation and sport opportunities for communities. This investment in health and well-being for our communities was made in response to the recommendations of community governments and our Northwest Territories recreation and sport partners.

Support for People

Mr. Speaker, we are making investments in our most valuable resource, our people. We know this investment will yield substantial returns.

Social Agenda

Last year, aboriginal, territorial and municipal leaders met with service providers and non-governmental organizations to discuss the development of a social agenda that would provide a framework to effect change and improve the quality of life of our citizens, their families and Northwest Territories communities.

A 20-member Social Agenda Working Group, with members from the GNWT, non-government organizations, the federal government, aboriginal governments, and the NWT Association of Municipalities will be reporting in April on progress made in developing this agenda. Between April and June, the group will work on developing indicators to measure the progress of social development over time.

This initiative provides a needed balance to the government's overall agenda. We have a responsibility to ensure that our people are strong enough to take advantage of the opportunities being created by our growing economy.

Although the lion's share of our budget is allocated in support of social programs, we know that serious challenges still exist. We know we need comprehensive, collaborative and system-wide action that cuts across departments, sectors and specific issues. The issue may not be how much we spend on social programs but whether our expenditures effectively accomplish the desired outcomes. We look forward to receiving the working group's specific, focused recommendations on how we can work together more closely to implement creative and innovative solutions to problems that are not only this government's concern but involve all public and aboriginal governments, communities, families and individuals.

The Social Agenda Working Group is wrestling with these issues. The working group has invested considerable energy in thinking through recommendations that will hopefully support departments in implementing their strategies and plans and ultimately lead to more effective and targeted expenditures of public funds. Those recommendations that require new funding will be considered for the 2003-2004 fiscal year. This does not mean, however, that we cannot act in the meantime on those recommendations that can be implemented within existing budgets.

Housing Initiatives

The supply of affordable private rental accommodation is a growing concern in communities where rental housing supply has not kept pace with the growing housing needs of wage earners. Mine workers, oil and gas workers, government workers and employees of new aboriginal governments and businesses all need affordable housing and have the means to

pay reasonable market rents. The shortage affects the Northwest Territories' potential for economic development and is an issue for GNWT recruitment and retention as well.

The GNWT intends to help the private sector to respond to the demand for affordable rental accommodation in non-tax based communities by introducing a four part program consisting of:

- ensuring private developer access to affordable financing by accepting contingent liability of mortgages for eligible projects;
- increasing availability of reasonably priced and financed lots by providing lot development financing from a revolving fund for non-tax based communities;
- providing developers with business plan development through existing GNWT staff expertise; and
- providing developers with information about cost effective techniques to encourage innovation and lower cost construction techniques.

Housing is not just an issue for smaller communities. Earlier this month, the Honourable Roger Allen, Minister Responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation, signed an Affordable Housing Agreement with the Government of Canada which will provide \$7.5 million in new federal funding over four years to help address housing issues in the Northwest Territories. The funds will be used for assisted rental housing for low-income seniors and singles and to increase the supply of affordable housing for low-income families. We will work to ensure that the new funds complement our other housing initiatives and do not distort the decisions of private developers. We are looking for long-term solutions to the affordable housing issue.

Maximizing Northern Employment

Mr. Speaker, last year the GNWT implemented a series of government-wide initiatives known as Maximizing Northern Employment to address the need for strategic investment in training and employment for Northwest Territories residents. We funded this initiative with a \$6.5 million investment, in addition to our existing training and employment programs. We are pleased to announce that for 2002-2003, all current initiatives will continue with an investment of \$7.3 million.

-- Applause

We want Northwest Territories residents to have the skills, knowledge and opportunity to participate fully in the northern economy. Maximizing Northern Employment initiatives are intended to address the real life challenges Northwest Territories residents, business and industry each confront in their efforts to contribute to the growing Northwest Territories economy.

Our efforts have already proven successful. Last summer, the Northern Student Program helped 342 students find summer jobs with the GNWT. These jobs provided students with work experience that can help them obtain full-time work after graduation.

The Northern Graduate Program and the Graduate Transition Program provide full-time work for recent post-secondary graduates in their field of study. Right now, 53 graduates are working in intern positions with the GNWT and the private

sector. In addition, 16 graduate teachers and one social worker have obtained work through the Northern Graduate Program. Five northern teachers have been granted education leave to work toward the completion of their teaching degree as well.

The Maximizing Northern Employment Program has allowed us to enhance the Nurse Mentorship Program and to develop a Social Work Mentorship Program. These support programs are necessary given the demands placed on new graduates, especially those working in more isolated communities. During the past year, 18 graduate nurses accessed this program and the number will be increased in the coming year.

The growth in our economy has created great demand for skilled trades-people. We are responding to that demand by significantly increasing opportunities for Northwest Territories residents to acquire new skills or to upgrade existing skills. Almost 300 participants have participated in 14 new training programs. The Drill Rig Training Program alone has put 64 people from across the North through the 18-day on-site training program last summer.

-- Applause

Some of the Maximizing Northern Employment programs will be funded through the Aboriginal Government/Private Sector Partnership Fund. The fund is designed to encourage GNWT partnerships with Aboriginal economic organizations and the private sector to recruit and develop a northern workforce. This year, 31 Northwest Territories businesses are sharing more than \$1.1 million to provide job training to more than 200 people.

Student success centres at Aurora College campuses in Yellowknife and Fort Smith are operational and a centre is planned for the Inuvik campus. The centres will help students be successful in their studies by providing a range of supports, including tutoring, career mentoring and personal counselling services.

As well, our goal of a northern teaching force is being helped by an expansion of the Teacher Education Program to the three campuses in Inuvik, Fort Smith and Yellowknife, and plans to introduce a Bachelor of Education Program. This increased investment made it possible for 63 full-time and five part-time students to enrol in the Teacher Education Program this year.

Income Support

Increased employment opportunities for northern residents have reduced the number of people on social assistance. This has resulted in significant savings in support expenditures. We are proposing that \$1.5 million in income support savings be reinvested to enhance program benefits including the singles accommodation benefit, the food allowances, the disability allowance, and the seniors' home heating subsidy. This investment will help to address the potential negative effects associated with increased economic activity in the Northwest Territories.

Health

Mr. Speaker, we all want to ensure a sustainable health and social services system. However, to achieve this, the system must change.

Last month, the Minister of Health and Social Services, the Honourable Michael Miltenberger, announced an action plan that will strengthen programs and services for all Northerners. The plan listed 45 actions that will be carried out over the next three years. The actions are focused on improving the quality and effectiveness of health and social services. It places a primary focus on close collaboration and cooperation between health care providers, health and social services authorities, and the GNWT.

During the 2002-2003 year, a number of new investments will be made to strengthen the health and social services system. We are proposing to invest \$250,000 for on-call centres to support clients and front line staff, \$320,000 for expanded action to address tuberculosis, and a \$270,000 pilot project to expand screening for breast cancer. In addition, over \$10 million has been added to the budget of Health and Social Services to meet the increased costs of providing existing services.

Funding for health initiatives also includes enhanced health protection measures. The Department of Public Works and Services, working closely with the Departments of Municipal and Community Affairs and Health and Social Services, will spend \$300,000 to identify and correct existing or potential deficiencies in drinking water systems and services in Northwest Territories communities.

Support for Children and Youth

Mr. Speaker, providing funds for education today is an investment in tomorrow. It is an investment in people at the same time as it is an investment for the Northwest Territories. For these reasons, this budget includes an additional \$2.7 million for student support services. Actions taken by this government continue to fulfil our legislative requirement to establish a pupil/teacher ratio of 16.5 to one for 2002-2003. In addition, we will increase student support funding to 15 per cent of school contributions, one year in advance of the requirement set out in legislation.

-- Applause

Last year, we implemented an Early Childhood Development Action Plan to improve programs and services for our youngest residents through enhanced program spending and better coordination of programs and delivery mechanisms. We committed \$10.5 million over three years for this plan. This budget includes nearly \$2.9 million in 2002-2003 for initiatives under this plan. This funding includes initiatives in speech development, literacy rates, screening tools for developmental delay tests, and a public awareness campaign to tackle key issues such as FAS/FAE and nutrition. In addition to these actions, we will be investing a further \$2 million for the implementation of the second year of a three-year plan to enhance child protection. Ten additional social workers and expanded professional training for workers and foster parents will be provided using these funds.

All Members of this Assembly have heard strong, clear messages, Mr. Speaker, from the Status of Women Council of the NWT, the Native Women's Association of the NWT and, in fact, all organizations represented on the Social Agenda Working Group, that many families need support in regaining self-sufficiency and pride. We need to provide families with access to quality, reliable childcare that is affordable for

parents. Investing in children's early years provides more opportunity for children to reach their full potential in school performance. It also can help reduce future expenditures. The Honourable Jake Ootes, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, will be implementing measures to increase day care support funding. This budget provides an additional \$1 million to fund these increases.

-- Applause

This initiative will both increase educational opportunities for children and respond to the needs of low-income northern families by removing barriers to affordable childcare.

Mr. Speaker, our young people are our future. We need to help our youth become healthy, educated people with the experiences and mentoring examples to make responsible personal choices. This budget includes \$1 million to develop and implement a Youth Corps.

-- Applause

The Youth Corps will be designed to improve the outlook and opportunities for young people by providing support and leadership for an extended time period. Activities in the Youth Corps will include work assignments, volunteer and community contribution assignments and skills improvement. We will also contribute funding to host another youth conference this year and will assist with the costs of youth activities delivered by community organizations.

Language and Culture

Our cultural diversity makes the Northwest Territories truly unique. It is one of our most precious resources and the source of our strength. This government is committed to supporting and celebrating our traditions, our diverse cultures and our languages and people. This budget includes a significant investment in this resource. First, an increased investment of \$919,000 will be provided to assist in the acquisition, maintenance and revitalization of our aboriginal languages and culture.

-- Applause

Second, \$521,000 has been allocated to facilitate the work of the Special Committee on the Review of the Official Languages Act.

Third, I am pleased to announce that, along with numerous sponsors from the public and private sector, our government will be helping to sponsor the Living History Project with a \$100,000 contribution to the three-day symposium the society is hosting in June of this year. The Living History Project explores the evolving social and political landscape of the Northwest Territories over the last 25 years. The planned symposium will have representatives from communities across the North and will include a visit from the Governor General of Canada, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, as part of the celebration of our heritage, the GNWT has allocated \$500,000 to mark the inauguration of National Aboriginal Day as a statutory holiday in the Northwest Territories. This funding will be used to support the planning of activities throughout the territory and to provide contributions to municipal, community, regional and territorial organizations in

support of community celebrations. We encourage all residents to join in the recognition of our aboriginal heritage on June 21st.

Income Tax Initiatives

Mr. Speaker, one of the ways to help Northwest Territories residents deal with economic conditions in the North is through the tax system. Last year, we changed the Northwest Territories personal income tax system from one of "Tax on Tax" to "Tax on Income". This change gave us more flexibility to design a system that meets our needs. In addition, we increased the maximum Cost of Living Tax Credit for Northwest Territories residents from \$645 to \$822, an increase of \$177. This change was effective for the 2001 tax year and residents will be receiving the increased credit after filing their tax returns in the next few months.

Last May, I established the Minister's Advisory Committee on Personal Income Taxation to provide recommendations on how the tax-on-income system could best serve the residents of the Northwest Territories. The advisory committee studied other provincial and territorial personal income tax regimes and reviewed public submissions. In October, the committee provided a report on the options available to the Government of Northwest Territories, including specific recommendations for seniors, persons with disabilities and low-income residents.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that I plan to take the necessary steps to implement the specific recommendations made by the advisory committee, which would lower taxes for all Northwest Territories taxpayers.

-- Applause

I plan to increase, effective July 1, 2002, the personal credit from \$550 to \$796, and the married credit from \$467 to \$796. In 2003, this change will save a single taxpayer \$245 and a single income couple \$575. These changes increase the level at which a single taxpayer pays no Northwest Territories income tax from \$14,447 to \$20,650 in 2003. For single earner couples, the income level will increase from \$26,076 to \$37,071.

-- Applause

Last summer, the NWT Seniors' Society recommended measures to ease the tax burden on low-income seniors. Effective July 1, 2002, I am proposing to increase the age credit from \$268 to \$389 as a measure that will specifically benefit senior residents. In addition, Mr. Speaker, I intend to increase the disability credit from \$445 to \$645, again effective July 1, 2002.

-- Applause

We are all aware of the high cost of living in the North. Last year's change to the Cost of Living Tax Credit will help address this problem. However, as Members pointed out last year during debate on this measure, further action is needed to provide relief for low-income residents of the Northwest Territories. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to announce this government's intention to introduce a minimum Cost of Living Tax Credit for low-income residents. This initiative will ensure a minimum Cost of Living Tax Credit of \$250 for an individual over the age of 18 and \$500 for a couple. This measure will be effective for the 2002 tax year.

These changes to our tax system will not only benefit seniors, disabled persons and low-income taxpayers but will allow the Northwest Territories to remain competitive with most other provincial jurisdictions. Increasing the tax credit amounts and the minimum Cost of Living Tax Credit will put extra money in the pockets of taxpayers, which in turn puts extra dollars into our communities. For example, the tax measures I have announced today will mean an additional \$62,000 on an annual basis in communities the size of Deline and Fort Resolution.

In total, Mr. Speaker, these measures will result in tax savings for Northwest Territories residents of \$4.3 million in 2002 and \$7.5 million in 2003.

-- Applause

These tax reductions respond to Northwest Territories residents' concerns about the cost of living in the North, especially for low-income individuals and families. These initiatives also respond to the pressures for the Northwest Territories to remain competitive with other Canadian jurisdictions. I will be introducing the legislation necessary to implement these tax changes later during this session.

Other provinces are lowering both personal income tax and corporate income taxes. We will be monitoring the changes made in other provinces as part of our ongoing efforts to keep the Northwest Territories tax structure comparable to the tax structures in the other provinces and territories.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, at this point we can clearly see our vision of a better tomorrow take shape. Our economy is strong and the promise of future prosperity is enormous. Our people are working and our businesses are prospering.

However, our vision is not yet complete. We know we have more work to do to ensure:

- that the benefits of development are shared between governments, communities and regions;
- that we have a diversified economy and encourage growth in all sectors;
- that development balances economic benefits, social impacts, and protection of the environment;
- that our people, our families and our communities are strong, healthy, educated and self-reliant;
- that our young people are motivated and prepared to take advantage of the opportunities available; and
- that the diversity of languages and cultures of the Northwest Territories is respected and encouraged.

Our fiscal situation allows us to continue to make investments in building our future that we would otherwise be unable to make. We have responded to the concerns and recommendations made to us. This budget sets out a balanced approach -- a balance between investing in the economy and in our people and our communities; a balance between developing our resources and protecting our land; and a balance between our current revenue capacity and our future spending needs.

Mr. Speaker, our approach is balanced, our foundations are level. We are ready to finish the job we have set out to do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister Handley. You had not advised us as to what kind of new shoes you were wearing for this occasion.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Mr. Speaker, this year, given the responsibilities we have, the fiscal situation we have, I thought I should get something that is very sensible, very conservative, that represents the responsibility we have. I want to ensure the Members though that these are not loafers.

-- Laughter

Call them what you want, but they are not loafers. There is no time for loafers. I also want to assure you that they have a good grip on the bottom so that we can keep a grip on everything that is happening.

So this year, Mr. Speaker, I chose something very conservative, very sensible in terms of the responsibilities. Thank you.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. We can use that as your Members' statement. At this point in the day, I would like to take the opportunity to recognize in our gallery the former Minister of Finance and former Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Michael Ballantyne.

-- Applause

As well, colleagues and guests, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize in the gallery former MLA for the Deh Cho and former Speaker, Samuel Gargan.

-- Applause

At this point, the House will rise and join the Minister of Finance and invite the guests to join the Minister of Finance for a reception in the Great Hall. We will reconvene at the bell.

-- Break

MR. SPEAKER: The House will now come back to order. Item 3, Ministers' statements. Item 4, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

ITEM 4: MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Member's Statement on Balance and Fairness in Government Spending

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak about the importance of recognizing the values of balance and fairness. In our western democratic tradition, these values are at the centre of our model of governance. This is even more so in our unique consensus style of government.

We recognize that the government cannot control everything. Development and economic activity will happen where certain resources naturally occur. Demand, markets and world prices

in the commodity sector will affect investment in exploration and development.

We heard the enthusiastic tone of the Minister of Finance's budget speech, but I would like to ask my colleagues on both sides of the House to continually ask ourselves if we as a government have done everything possible to ensure our financial resources are being invested in a way which fairly recognizes the importance of all regions.

The constant lens of government needs to be balanced in fairness in everything we do. Mr. Speaker, I want to underline that no one begrudges prosperity in Yellowknife. Indeed, it is the quest of all our communities and prosperity is at the heart of the aspirations of every community large and small, urban and rural.

However, we recognize that development spawns more development. This economic activity then feeds on itself. When we attend to our duties here in the capital it is easy to become discouraged and even sometimes downright depressed about the corresponding level of activity in the communities that we represent. It is hard to see the balance. I notice that the word balance was mentioned quite frequently today in the budget address.

I have a simple solution. Let's draw a map, look at recent and current activity within GNWT control and ensure that no region is being left behind. It sounds so simple, but we cannot forget about any group, any sector, any region or any community. Our strength is in our diversity. Yes, we have a promising resource sector and we are thankful for that, but do we need to have the consequent development and activity from this sector all based in the capital?

Mr. Speaker, surely we should ask the following question. Every time a new initiative or opportunity arises, can this function or activity reasonably be directed outside of Yellowknife, whether it is centres of excellence and centralized functions arising from the Health and Social Services plan, federal jobs being devolved from Ottawa, or a new Energy Secretariat, new capital infrastructure with associated programs and jobs -- does it have to all happen in Yellowknife?

I would strongly suggest...

MR. SPEAKER: Mrs. Groenewegen, your time for your Member's statement has ended.

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

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. The honourable Member is seeking unanimous consent to conclude her statement. Are there any nays? There are no nays. Mrs. Groenewegen, you may conclude your statement.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues. I would strongly suggest that in these modern times we have many tools like advanced communications and affordable inter-community travel that can all assist communities in taking full advantage of new opportunities. This distribution of opportunity may take our recent focus from mega to smaller scale but effective development. What other sectors can be initiated, revived or enhanced in our communities and regions? Activities like big game outfitting, eco-tourism, crafts,

hunting, trapping, commercial fishing, forestry and manufacturing just to name a few. Diamonds, oil and gas and minerals are exciting, but we cannot forget about the activities that have traditionally contributed to our northern economy that are readily accessible to our people.

I strongly urge this government to see the strength and balance in diversity, urban and rural, renewable and non-renewable, broad based mega-projects and small community-friendly activities. In closing, the future of the North may look bright, but it is only relevant to our people as it translates into fair access to many different types of opportunities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Item 4, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Deh Cho, Mr. McLeod.

Member's Statement on Deh Cho Bridge Proposal

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in Towards A Better Tomorrow, we set out the vision and priorities for this 14th Assembly. In our vision we used terms like working together, strong partnerships, taking advantage of the opportunities and sharing northern benefits. In our strategies, we said we would pursue partnership arrangements to help build infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Fort Providence were certainly listening. The Fort Providence Combined Council Alliance is a partnership between the Deh Gah Got'ie Kúé Dene Council, the Fort Providence Metis Council, Fort Providence Hamlet Council and the Deh Gah Got'ie Kúé Betterment Corporation. The council is proposing to work with this government to design, finance, build and operate a permanent crossing of the Deh Cho, or Mackenzie River, at Fort Providence.

-- Applause

I believe that this proposal is a good one. It promises reduced costs to business, industry, government and consumers. It will improve the reliability of transportation to over half of our population and most of our productive mineral regions. It will reduce the ongoing environmental impacts and risks to the Deh Cho. It can pay for itself and does not need to take dollars from other projects. At the end of the agreement, the bridge will be turned over to the Government of the Northwest Territories in good condition at no cost, and will continue to provide benefits to the North for decades after.

Mr. Speaker, the project approach is something new to the North that will require courage and a leap of faith and depart from the usual way of doing things. As people are beginning to understand the work done by the alliance and the proposal they are making, the initial doubts are giving way to optimism, encouragement and support. The alliance has made formal proposals to the GNWT and at this time is seeking an agreement-in-principle.

This is not a small project, Mr. Speaker. We must approach this with the care and attention that an investment of \$45 million deserves. A positive response will signal that the GNWT is willing to negotiate a long-term contract arrangement that will meet everyone's interests. This sign of support will allow us to

go ahead with environmental assessment, final designs and financing plans.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents I would like to thank the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Honourable Bob Nault, and Minister of RWED, the Honourable Jim Antoine, for helping to fund the feasibility study. I would also like to thank the Minister of Transportation and Finance, the Honourable Joe Handley, and the Honourable Ethel Blondin-Andrew, for their support in developing the proposal.

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. McLeod, your time for Member's statement is finished.

MR. MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, I seek consent to conclude my statement.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. The honourable Member is seeking unanimous consent to conclude his statement. Are there any nays? There are no nays. You may conclude your statement, Mr. McLeod.

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I must also thank the Members for their encouragement and support. I look forward to a positive response to this proposal. I look forward to successful conclusion to negotiations and an agreement to proceed with this exciting project.

Most of all, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to crossing the Deh Cho on a permanent bridge in the spring of 2005. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Item 4, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

Member's Statement on Comments on the Budget Address

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to address a couple of aspects of the budget that we just heard this afternoon. It is, indeed, at this time, a good news budget. The original intent, the strategy that was adopted at the beginning of this Assembly was to take some chances, invest in the future, given that we did not really know what was going to be coming up. We went out and put some money and energy into areas such as training and infrastructure. Those are working and paying off to our benefit.

Mr. Handley outlined a couple of areas where we are seeing double digit improvements in a lot of critical areas of our economy. Exports up 19 percent, retail sales up 10 percent. Our unemployment rates are down 14 percent. These are numbers, these are results that would have any other part of Canada, and probably do, turning just a little bit green with envy.

There are a couple of aspects in here, Mr. Speaker, that as a government, as a society, as a very thriving part of Canada we have to take into account. One of them, Mr. Speaker, is that the volatility of our income stream, our revenue stream, is very unpredictable.

We are, as Minister Handley has I think tried to underline here and emphasize, things that are essentially out of our control, that is why we are in this surplus situation right now. We cannot

and should not count on it in the future, and we have to look at our spending and investment strategies with great care for the next couple of years at least to make sure that we do not slip too far into that deficit and that debt wall.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that there is one area here that really stands out, an increase of 20 percent in our exports to a value of \$1.375 billion. Mr. Speaker, those are revenues and revenue streams that this government and the people of the North do not have control of. We should have it. I can only express my optimism and my support for the Intergovernmental Forum process to resolve how we are going to get control of that revenue stream into the hands of Northerners. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. Item 4, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

Member's Statement on Implementing Affirmative Action

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my statement today is around the employment opportunities that this government has to offer and the people who have made a choice to make a career with this government. They have put 20-odd years in working in all sectors of the government. I have a real concern when it comes to the makeup of our government in the senior management areas and the different sectors of our economy where we are not the employer of choice now. We have other sectors out there who are offering employees of this government the option for, in most cases, a better salary, benefits and an opportunity to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, this issue has been raised time and time again. We have policies in this government in regard to affirmative action. We have looked at the area of promoting people to ensure that the government reflects the geographical make up of the North and the population of the North. In senior management positions, there are very few, if not a handful, of aboriginal people in the senior management of the government, from deputy ministers to assistant deputy ministers to directors -- even superintendents at the regional level.

We have to do more to ensure that we do not lose these people to the other sector because of frustration, to realize that we do not have a monopoly on the people of the North anymore. We are not the employer of choice and we should not take them for granted. We have to do more to assist the employees in this government and ensure that they do have a workplace that they feel comfortable in.

To ensure that they feel that at the end of the day they are happy to go back into that workforce, knowing that they have an alternative to the Government of the Northwest Territories.

We talk about Maximizing Northern Employment; we talk about opportunities in the oil and gas and diamond industry; the federal government is talking about expanding. We have lost a lot of good people from this government to those different sectors already.

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Krutko, your time for your Member's statement has ended.

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

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. The honourable Member is seeking unanimous consent to conclude his statement. Are there any nays? There are no nays. You may conclude your statement, Mr. Krutko.

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have lost a lot of good people who have made a career in this government to the other sectors like the federal government, the diamond industry, the oil and gas industry and now the aboriginal organizations in the North. We are talking about self-government. We are talking about claims negotiations.

I think this government has to do more to ensure that the employees of this government are able to realize their potential by offering them the ability to show that potential by assisting them to advance in their careers. At what day, at what place and at what time will we see the majority of people in the senior management of this government reflecting the population of this Territory?

Almost 50 percent of the population is aboriginal. We have used this excuse time and time again, we talk about policies -- we have hiring policies, affirmative action policies, but yet nothing has happened.

Mr. Speaker, I will be asking Ministers questions on this matter later on. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Item 4, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Hay River North, Mr. Delorey.

Member's Statement on Recruitment and Retention of Health Care Professionals

MR. DELOREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to address an issue that is affecting a large portion of our health care professionals. The issue I am referring to, Mr. Speaker, is the recent announcement of a further recruitment and retention bonus of registered nurses in the Northwest Territories.

I agree wholeheartedly, Mr. Speaker, that we need to provide incentives to our allied health care professionals in order to provide adequate health care throughout the North. My point, Mr. Speaker, is that these incentives should be provided to all health care professionals. It is not secret, Mr. Speaker, that this government has spent an exorbitant amount of money on recruitment and retention of health care professionals.

Mr. Speaker, we have 26 licensed practical nurses, also known as LPNs, registered in Hay River. At last count, there are 38 in Yellowknife, 11 in Fort Smith, eight in Inuvik, four in Fort Simpson and one in Fort Resolution.

There was a study done in British Columbia, Mr. Speaker, that showed that LPNs are underused. There is a 60 percent overlap in skills between RNs and LPNs. If the LPNs were used to their full potential there would be no need for bed closures or staff concerns.

Mr. Speaker, morale is low amongst allied health care professionals in the North due to the physical shortages and staff recruitment problems. We as a government do not need to

add this as an issue that has proven to be divisive to health care workers.

The Hay River Community Health Board, Mr. Speaker, has experienced severe shortages in staffing over the last few years. We were without a speech language pathologist for over a year-and-a-half.

Mr. Speaker, RNs and LPNs were not able to take vacations at their leisure due to staffing problems. All of this creates inherent stress for all health care providers.

Mr. Speaker, in 1999 a memorandum of understanding was signed by the UNW, Financial Management Board Secretariat, and Health and Social Services. This temporary nurse market supplement provided for a recruitment bonus of \$5,000 for nurses upon hire. Mr. Speaker, this temporary supplement also provided for a retention bonus based on years of service payable to indeterminate front-line nurses as of September 1, 1999, and again on September 1, 2000.

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Delorey, your time for Member's statement has ended.

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

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. The honourable Member is seeking unanimous consent to conclude his statement. Are there any nays? There are no nays. You may conclude your statement, Mr. Delorey.

MR. DELOREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues. The funding was extended for the year 2001-2002, and a further MOU signed for the recruitment portion only, which is effective April 1, 2002. Mr. Speaker, I would like to categorically state that I am not against our registered nurses receiving this bonus. On the contrary, I believe that we cannot say enough about how blessed we are in the Northwest Territories to have the calibre of nurses that we do.

Mr. Speaker, my concern is that there appears to have been a value placed on registered nurses over their allied health care professionals by this government. At the appropriate time, Mr. Speaker, I will have further questions for the Minister responsible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Delorey. Item 4, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, Mr. Roland.

Member's Statement on Affirmative Action Policy Implementation

MR. ROLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about this government's practices when it comes to employees and the affirmative action policy. Mr. Speaker, it has been unfortunate that this has been an issue that has been highlighted through numerous Assemblies and sessions and through Members who have come and gone raising issues around the affirmative action policy.

Mr. Speaker, there are legitimate times when the policy works and there are times when it does not work. We hear from sides that say it was a tool just to fill up a quota and people would

feel that is how they were placed, and some people would take it as a slight in the sense of not being measured for their worth. Instead, they were measured for just a number to fit into a program. But there are occasions, Mr. Speaker, when we have individuals who rise through the ranks and in fact have proven beyond any doubt that they have managed to do things on their own, and the affirmative action policy is something that I do not think they really needed. But there are times when they feel that is the only avenue they have left because it is hard to get into the higher echelons, if you want to call it, of government, Mr. Speaker. It seems to be a very closed group in certain areas.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to speak badly about anyone, people who are in the government who have put many years into their jobs to get to where they are. They deserve recognition for how far they have come. But there comes a time when we must measure ourselves in the sense of what we have achieved and what we are doing as elected leaders when it comes to those that do the work for us that we set here, Mr. Speaker. We are the ones that sort of set the pace because we set the laws of the land in a sense, and it is our staff that carry out these decisions. Sometimes our staff out there feel that they have no other opportunity but to raise their issues in a different circumstance because they feel they are not protected.

Mr. Speaker, I will have questions following this government's actions when it comes to dealing with employees of this government. When they make a commitment to an employee, why is that commitment not followed through with? Later on I will have questions for the appropriate Minister. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Roland. Item 4, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Nitah.

Member's Statement on Comments on the Budget Address

MR. NITAH: Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today our Finance Minister introduced the budget for 2002-2003. At first glance, the budget looks good and we are going to have to take some time to have a closer look at it. The agenda for a better tomorrow seems to be incorporated in here, but I will speak to the fact of the inequity of funding between smaller communities and larger tax-based municipalities.

There are 33 communities in the Northwest Territories and 27 of them are non-tax based. A lot of those communities would be considered third world, as compared to first world here in Yellowknife. I look forward to asking questions of the different Ministers with their departmental responsibilities, such as the mention in this budget of growth in the communities. How does the government plan to focus on growth in the smaller communities? What do they mean by infrastructure development? What do they mean by growth in small communities? Do they mean population? Do they mean businesses? Or do they mean infrastructure such as sidewalks, one simple example?

I look forward to the next four weeks and the next year to implement this budget and I will be asking questions of the different departments over the next three weeks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Mahsi, Mr. Nitah. Item 4, Members' statements. Item 5, returns to oral questions. Item 6,

recognition of visitors in the gallery. The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Handley.

ITEM 6: RECOGNITION OF VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to recognize one of my constituents and one of the hard-working people on the Homeless Coalition, Captain Karen Hoeft. Thank you.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you and welcome to the gallery. I admire your ability to stick it out. Item 6, recognition of visitors in the gallery. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

ITEM 7: ORAL QUESTIONS

Question 15-14(5): Status of Assistant Deputy Minister Position

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment and it is with regard to the position of the assistant deputy minister of Education, Culture and Employment. I would like to ask the Minister exactly what is the status of that position and has the position been filled?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

Return to Question 15-14(5): Status of Assistant Deputy Minister Position

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the position is not vacant. The employee that was there will be returning to employment within a very short period of time to that position. There is no vacancy there. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Krutko.

Supplementary to Question 15-14(5): Status of Assistant Deputy Minister Position

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the position has been vacant for some three-and-a-half months now. I would like to know exactly why it has taken so long to have that position filled?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

Further Return to Question 15-14(5): Status of Assistant Deputy Minister Position

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, with the employee in the position, it was decided mutually that there would be approximately three months to look at some issues, that she could be re-oriented back into the department. We needed a time frame there to do that. She will be coming back into the department within several weeks. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Krutko.

Supplementary to Question 15-14(5): Status of Assistant Deputy Minister Position

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister exactly what effect has it been to the department by not having anyone in this position for over three months.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

Further Return to Question 15-14(5): Status of Assistant Deputy Minister Position

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do not feel that it has been because we have had our people back up into the position, including the deputy minister taking over some of the responsibilities in the interim. It has meant a period of time of a lot of work for the individuals down the line and the deputy minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Final supplementary, Mr. Krutko.

Supplementary to Question 15-14(5): Status of Assistant Deputy Minister Position

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell us exactly how many people have been recruited to fill that position?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

Further Return to Question 15-14(5): Status of Assistant Deputy Minister Position

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No one has been recruited to fill the position on a permanent basis. The deputy minister has acted as the responsibility for the education and culture side. She has taken the individuals that are on that particular side and asked them to fill in wherever necessary. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Nitah.

Question 16-14(5): Medical and Escort Travel Policies

MR. NITAH: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question this afternoon is for the Minister of Health and Social Services dealing with medical travel and support services for those on medical travel.

What is the current policy for medical travel assistance for family members of those who are in dire straits, who are terminally ill, who have to be transported to Edmonton, where a large percentage of our patients are going from the Northwest Territories? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nitah. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Return to Question 16-14(5): Medical and Escort Travel Policies

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are escorts provided when it is deemed necessary by the staff. There are no compassionate travel benefits currently under the existing medical travel policy. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Nitah.

Supplementary to Question 16-14(5): Medical and Escort Travel Policies

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister elaborate for the House on the escort? What is their role and responsibility when they travel with the patients? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nitah. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Further Return to Question 16-14(5): Medical and Escort Travel Policies

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, an escort would provide or could provide a number of functions. They could be there because the person is going to need assistance because of the treatment required. They could be there to provide assistance if the person is not fluent in English and they are going to facilities where there are no interpreter services. They could be there because it is deemed appropriate for the mental health and the particular needs at that time that the escort is with the patient. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Nitah.

Supplementary to Question 16-14(5): Medical and Escort Travel Policies

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While in Edmonton, are there any government programs or services to support the patient and/or the escorts for the patients? Are there any government services or individuals in Edmonton to support northern patients? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nitah. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Further Return to Question 16-14(5): Medical and Escort Travel Policies

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have an arrangement with Larga Homes. As well, I believe there are two nurses there to assist patients from the North. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Final supplementary, Mr. Nitah.

Supplementary to Question 16-14(5): Medical and Escort Travel Policies

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is there are two individuals or two nurses to support northern patients. They do not speak any official languages of the Northwest Territories other than English and their support services are questionable at the very best.

Can the Minister elaborate on what kind of qualifications should these support staff have while they are in Edmonton to support northern patients? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nitah. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Further Return to Question 16-14(5): Medical and Escort Travel Policies

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the people who are there to deal with Northerners should of course be aware of the issues and the environment that the people are coming from. They should have the required professional background.

This issue, I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker, is one that we are going to be looking at as we renegotiate our contract with the capital health authority to make sure we have adequate and appropriate services that we need for the people of the Northwest Territories.

It has not been done since 1996 and these kinds of issues are going to be very important to ensure that the services that we are going to have here are appropriate. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Deh Cho, Mr. McLeod.

Question 17-14(5): Community Constable Program Funding

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Justice a question regarding the Community Constable Program. Mr. Speaker, for many, many years now we have heard complaints from the communities who have had to deal with public mischief, public damage, juvenile delinquency. With the recent community development that has happened, there has been an escalation of criminal activity in our communities.

I, as the MLA for the Deh Cho, three of the four communities that I represent have no RCMP. The one community that does have an RCMP presence are saying that they are overworked.

I am aware that there is funding from Justice, from MACA, from the RCMP themselves, the Solicitor General of Canada, for training and for uniforms and the community is responsible to pick up the wages, benefits and the insurance. That comes to a very healthy sum. I am estimating around \$50,000 for the community portion.

I would like to ask the Minister if there is any consideration for funding to cover wages for the communities that are requesting this program? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Justice, Mr. Allen.

Return to Question 17-14(5): Community Constable Program Funding

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are currently reviewing the status of the Community Constable Program. We do want to come forth with an action plan in the next several weeks to address the ongoing pressures that are stated by the Member here.

We do need a bit of time, but just to make the Member aware, we are continually working to find more effective ways of supporting this program. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. McLeod.

Supplementary to Question 17-14(5): Community Constable Program Funding

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Minister for his response, however, I think there are agreements currently being signed and deals being made that are creating false expectations in our communities.

I would like to ask the Minister if he would ensure that the communities are fully aware of what they are getting into and what their responsibilities are, and that there currently is no money to cover wages.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Justice, Mr. Allen.

Further Return to Question 17-14(5): Community Constable Program Funding

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to refer back to the earlier question in support of the second question, the Department of the Solicitor General of Canada recently announced program funding in the amount of \$135,700 to enhance the Community Constable Program.

It does include program development, consultation with communities and training of constables, and also support for increased wages. I am certainly prepared to communicate that through to the communities. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Allen. Supplementary, Mr. McLeod.

Supplementary to Question 17-14(5): Community Constable Program Funding

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is very encouraging to hear that there are some initiatives in the works. My understanding of what the Minister has stated is that there are some dollars coming down the tubes from the Solicitor General for wages. I would like to ask my final question. When can we expect to see this program being implemented? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Justice, Mr. Allen.

Further Return to Question 17-14(5): Community Constable Program Funding

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we are trying to put together this action plan so that we may implement it for the new fiscal year in April, 2002.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Hay River North, Mr. Delorey.

Question 18-14(5): Recruitment and Retention Bonuses

MR. DELOREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question, Mr. Speaker, is for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Mr. Speaker, this government has provided a considerable amount of money in the form of recruitment and retention bonuses to our registered nurses since 1999, with a further benefit for the recruitment portion, which will go into effect on April 1, 2002.

Could the Minister please advise this House as to exactly how much money the Government of the Northwest Territories has spent on recruitment and retention bonuses to registered nurses in the Northwest Territories since the original memorandum of understanding was signed in 1999? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Delorey. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Return to Question 18-14(5): Recruitment and Retention Bonuses

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it was several millions of dollars. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Delorey.

MR. DELOREY: I am not sure if the Minister said \$7 million or several million.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Just for clarification, the Chair heard several million. Supplementary, Mr. Delorey.

Supplementary to Question 18-14(5): Recruitment and Retention Bonuses

MR. DELOREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have recently been provided with some correspondence that the department will consider providing enhanced recruitment efforts for students entering the health care field, increased professional development opportunities for front line workers, in addition to standardized orientation programs, exit interviews, et cetera.

While I am encouraged by the department's efforts, I note that there is no mention of monetary rewards to the other allied health care professionals. Would the Minister please advise if his department will be providing a recruitment and retention bonus to all allied health care professionals in the form of monetary compensation, the same way that it has been provided to RNs? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Delorey. Before the honourable Minister responds to that, I would just like to remind

Members that it is their direction that the Chair ask Members to limit the amount of preamble prior to the first question, shorter preamble for second, so...the honourable Minister responsible for Health, a short response.

Further Return to Question 18-14(5): Recruitment and Retention Bonuses

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Member has raised some very good points about the downside of recruitment and retention bonuses targeted to a specific profession. One of the things we are looking at with the review of the recruitment and retention program is the whole role of these particular supplements. It is going to be dealt with through that process and will be part of the package that is going to be there with a comprehensive human resource strategy. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Delorey.

Supplementary to Question 18-14(5): Recruitment and Retention Bonuses

MR. DELOREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that under the Canadian Human Rights Act and equal wage guidelines that were issued by the Canadian Human Rights Commission, government must adhere to the standards of people paid for work of equal value. I have already stated that there have been studies done to show that there is at least 60 percent overlap in the skills between RNs and LPNs. Would the Minister please explain to this House how the government can apparently circumvent the equal pay guidelines and the Canadian Human Rights Commission by providing these recruitment and retention bonuses to RNs and not LPNs? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Delorey. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Further Return to Question 18-14(5): Recruitment and Retention Bonuses

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the intent is to make such bonuses and supplements part of the collective bargaining process. The issue of the overlap with the LPNs and RNs and the need for nurse practitioners, because there are some things that they can do that doctors now do in small communities, is a very critical one in terms of sustainability and it is one once again where we are addressing as we move ahead as fast as we can with the action plan. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Final supplementary...no supplementary? Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, Mr. Roland.

Question 19-14(5): Assistant Deputy Minister Reinstatement

MR. ROLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in my Member's statement, I spoke about individuals who come to work for his government, who have made it up the ladder to try and come up and do their work in the headquarters of the Government of the Northwest Territories. It is following on a question from my colleague, Mr. Krutko, in which the Minister

responded about the ADM position, that it would be six to eight weeks before this position or person is reinstated in that position. Is that correct? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Roland. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

Return to Question 19-14(5): Assistant Deputy Minister Reinstatement

HON. JAKE OOTES: No, Mr. Speaker. I believe the position will be refilled -- just putting a mental picture -- probably within three weeks, a maximum of four weeks.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Roland.

Supplementary to Question 19-14(5): Assistant Deputy Minister Reinstatement

MR. ROLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is much discussion and public airing about this and outcry from the Delta, as this individual is from the Delta. There was a commitment made by the Premier as well as the Minister as to a certain action plan that has been followed up. Now, we have reached the time limit of that action plan, so what has occurred to extend this time line? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Roland. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

Further Return to Question 19-14(5): Assistant Deputy Minister Reinstatement

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We would have liked to proceed quicker than we would have, Mr. Speaker, but there was one final area that we wanted to work on together, which I think we are trying to work out mutually, and that is important in the situation, Mr. Speaker. There is a commitment, as I said, right from months back that the individual will be reoriented, repositioned in her position, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Roland.

Supplementary to Question 19-14(5): Assistant Deputy Minister Reinstatement

MR. ROLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the Minister is making a commitment in this House that in three or four weeks, that position will be filled by the existing person that is there? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Roland. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

Further Return to Question 19-14(5): Assistant Deputy Minister Reinstatement

HON. JAKE OOTES: That is correct, Mr. Speaker. The individual who was in the position will be returning. There has just been a leave for the moment. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Yellowknife South, Mr. Bell.

Question 20-14(5): Reported RCMP Shortage

MR. BELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is for the Minister of Justice. Reacting to some of the media reports today about shortages at the RCMP detachment in Yellowknife and the potential for cutting some programs around the North, like the DARE Program, as well as a reduction in service levels, a possible inability to respond to property offences, obviously I am very concerned. We all know that the RCMP perform an invaluable service in this community and around the North. Can the Minister of Justice update us and tell us what is going on here?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bell. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Justice, Mr. Allen.

Return to Question 20-14(5): Reported RCMP Shortage

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we too were very surprised at the announcement. It came suddenly, unexpectedly. Certainly we recognize it would put some tremendous differences, especially on the DARE Program. We also feel that some of the other areas were never really fully complemented in terms of some of the policing, in terms of its approach, so we intend to consult with the chief superintendent on this matter upon his return. This certainly is...for the next period of time, we are trying to wait for more information on the detail. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Bell.

Supplementary to Question 20-14(5): Reported RCMP Shortage

MR. BELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is very concerning. We have been trying to get away from single member detachments and we have been lobbying this government to put funding in so we can have all two-member departments, at least. You know, when we see something like this, I am really concerned that programs like the DARE Program will drop off and be gone forever. Will the Minister give us a commitment that this government will step into the breach, if that is required, and make sure that this program does not die?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bell. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Justice, Mr. Allen.

Further Return to Question 20-14(5): Reported RCMP Shortage

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is purely preliminary. We are still assessing the situation. We are still assessing the news release on this matter. We do require a bit of time so that we may address this with the chief superintendent upon his return to Yellowknife. That is as much information that we can provide the Member at this time. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Bell.

Supplementary to Question 20-14(5): Reported RCMP Shortage

MR. BELL: Thank you. Can the Minister let us know when we are expecting the return of the chief superintendent? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bell. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Justice, Mr. Allen.

Further Return to Question 20-14(5): Reported RCMP Shortage

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I expect that we should have word sometime this week upon his return. We will advise the Member. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

Question 21-14(5): Reinstatement of Assistant Deputy Minister

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is again for the Minister of Education. I for one find it hard to believe the Minister that things are going to be hunky-dory in another three weeks. It has already been three-and-a-half months, and yet nothing has really been done to allow this individual to come back to the workplace and carry out her duties.

I for one had an opportunity to speak to the Minister and speak to the individual personally on this matter. She has been sitting at home for two weeks waiting for a phone call from the department. I would like to ask the Minister again, why is it such a hard pill to swallow for your department to allow this individual to come back into the workplace?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

Return to Question 21-14(5): Reinstatement of Assistant Deputy Minister

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, Mr. Speaker, this is a personnel matter. It is difficult to speak in detail of this. I would be more than glad to sit down with the Member, if he wishes, to let me explain to him the process we are going through.

What I would like to say is that we do have a process that we have been working with. I understand that our personnel people have been in touch with this individual to work things out. There is no reason on my part to disbelieve that we are not in a good process to proceed and have the individual come back into the position as quickly as possible. It would be my preference to do that as quickly as possible but we would like to use a mechanism that had been agreed to. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Krutko.

Supplementary to Question 21-14(5): Reinstatement of Assistant Deputy Minister

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister why this individual could not come back into the workplace, carry out her duties and work out these problems that you say are there? Why is she not able to come back and carry out her duties as assistant deputy minister?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

Further Return to Question 21-14(5): Reinstatement of Assistant Deputy Minister

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, she will be back in her position within a short period of time. I think I have to respect the personnel situation here, Mr. Speaker, and I cannot publicly start getting into the process that has been worked out.

I think it is important to respect the privacy of the individual in this case. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Krutko.

Supplementary to Question 21-14(5): Reinstatement of Assistant Deputy Minister

MR. KRUTKO: Will the Minister commit to me and my colleague from Inuvik to have a meeting with your department and the parties at hand to talk this through and try and find a solution to this problem so that this person can come back to work sooner rather than later?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

Further Return to Question 21-14(5): Reinstatement of Assistant Deputy Minister

HON. JAKE OOTES: Well, certainly I will commit to initially meet with the Members to discuss this and then I have to take into account our usual process that we use for personnel matters. I will do my best here to try and do something in that area. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Final supplementary, Mr. Krutko.

Supplementary to Question 21-14(5): Reinstatement of Assistant Deputy Minister

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister, do you have a protocol when you come to these types of issues? In a situation such as this, why is it taking such a long time? Do you have a mechanism in place that you can resolve issues within a short time frame so that an individual does not have to sit at home for almost four-and-a-half months?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

Further Return to Question 21-14(5): Reinstatement of Assistant Deputy Minister

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, a personnel approach here has tried to be worked out mutually on this matter.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Nitah.

Question 22-14(5): Southern Medical Support Services

MR. NITAH: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Social Services. I would like to continue the line of questioning that I started off with earlier this afternoon.

I appreciate that the Minister responded by saying that there is going to be a new contractual arrangement made with support staff at the Edmonton hospitals to support northern patients. I would like to ask the Minister, would he consider having cross-cultural training for any individuals that are considered for those positions, to reflect the needs and aspirations of aboriginal people and their cultures? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nitah. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Further Return to Question 22-14(5): Southern Medical Support Services

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would consider having that as a criteria for what we are going to be requiring as we renegotiate this contract. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Nitah.

Supplementary to Question 22-14(5): Southern Medical Support Services

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through our formal committee system, can the Minister commit to Members in the House today that the terms of reference or the criteria used to identify these people in these positions be made available to be shared with the Standing Committee on Social Programs? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nitah. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Further Return to Question 22-14(5): Southern Medical Support Services

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I have already written to the Social Programs committee to invite them, when we have time in March, to come down with us and do a tour. We are going to look at the facilities and assess those issues first-hand.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Nitah.

Supplementary to Question 22-14(5): Southern Medical Support Services

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister go to the aboriginal communities in the Northwest Territories up and down the Mackenzie Valley to speak to members of those communities to identify protocols of culturally relevant, spiritually relevant, traditional medicine uses relevant to the positions, and to the responsibilities of those positions? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nitah. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Further Return to Question 22-14(5): Southern Medical Support Services

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have committed to going to all the communities within the Northwest Territories within the year, and when I am in the communities, those are just the kinds of discussions that I hope we can have with the people there, with the health care providers and the community leaders and the residents of the various communities. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Final supplementary, Mr. Nitah.

Supplementary to Question 22-14(5): Southern Medical Support Services

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I know the government does not provide assistance to families of patients who are terminally ill and often have to be in Edmonton, to get down there and back, but can his department create an environment down there that will assist individuals who are there to comfort their loved ones? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nitah. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Further Return to Question 22-14(5): Southern Medical Support Services

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if in fact that environment that the Member refers to is found to be wanting, we will take the steps to address those shortcomings through this negotiation process. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

Question 23-14(5): Minimum Cost of Living Tax Credit

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Finance in relation to some information that was contained in today's budget announcement. In relation to income tax initiatives, specifically, Mr. Speaker, the intention to introduce a minimum cost of living tax credit for low income residents. Good news, I think, across the board on that one.

I wanted to specifically ask whether this tax credit is something that will be clawed back from income support recipients? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Finance, Mr. Handley.

Return to Question 23-14(5): Minimum Cost of Living Tax Credit

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Mr. Speaker, I am not 100 percent sure that it will be clawed back because I do not really know how the benefit from that tax credit will be treated. This is an area that is more within Mr. Ootes' file, but I have asked my staff and they told me they thought it would be, but they were not certain. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Braden.

Supplementary to Question 23-14(5): Minimum Cost of Living Tax Credit

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I take it then that this is still a policy area that the government has to look at and is very specific to this cost of living tax credit? When could the Minister confirm how this initiative is going to impact income support recipients? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Finance, Mr. Handley.

Further Return to Question 23-14(5): Minimum Cost of Living Tax Credit

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I will double check on this and certainly get back to the Member before this House recesses. Hopefully we can do it much sooner than that. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

Question 24-14(5): Representative Public Service

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Premier from my opening statement and ensuring that employees of this government feel comfortable working for this government, and also that we follow the Affirmative Action Policy and ensure we have a reflective workforce within this government, especially in senior and middle management areas like regional superintendents, deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers.

Mr. Speaker, it has been an issue for several years and we do not see it being reflected in this government. I would like to ask the Deputy Premier what action are you taking as the Government of the Northwest Territories to show that we have a reflective workforce that reflects the population of the Northwest Territories?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Deputy Premier, Mr. Antoine.

Return to Question 24-14(5): Representative Public Service

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Affirmative Action Policy of this government has been around for a long time and we have been monitoring it through statistics from the different departments throughout the government on the affirmative action.

We have aboriginal people who are within the territorial government workforce in the various departments and affirmative action also encompasses women in the workforce, as well as disabled people.

Looking at that, we currently have approximately 30 percent of our workforce throughout the various government departments who are aboriginal people. The departments are closely monitoring it and encouraging employment for aboriginal people. We have done some studies. The Grant Thornton study that came out indicated the statistics.

I know that MLAs have looked at it very closely and they have also indicated that there are some concerns there. As a government, we are continuing to monitor this. Certainly there is a lot of work that we should be focusing on but at this current time, the affirmative action is there and we encourage the different departments on their own to initiate and implement this policy. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Krutko.

Supplementary to Question 24-14(5): Representative Public Service

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the Deputy Premier stated, they have realized themselves that there is very little movement in that area. The Deputy Premier mentioned that they are taking action in the different areas. I would like to ask the Deputy Premier exactly what is that action? What is being done to ensure that we do see a change in opened up opportunities in government with regard to affirmative action candidates?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Deputy Premier, Mr. Antoine.

Further Return to Question 24-14(5): Representative Public Service

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has delegated the authority for human resources to every department, so as a government we try to follow the Affirmative Action Policy. It is up to the departments to look at and promote this affirmative action. It has to be a key human resource strategy by each department now to come up with how they could implement the strategy. If it is a problem by the honourable Member that we should be more vigilant and be more aggressive in this initiative, then that is what we as a government will have to do. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Premier. Supplementary, Mr. Krutko.

Supplementary to Question 24-14(5): Representative Public Service

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister exactly what action is being taken for those departments that do not follow the Affirmative Action Policy and where you do not see any increases in the number of affirmative action candidates? You mentioned 30 percent. That is low. We do have 50-odd percent of the population that is aboriginal. I would like to ask the Minister exactly what action do you take against those departments that do not live up to the obligations of the Affirmative Action Policy?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Deputy Premier, Mr. Antoine.

Further Return to Question 24-14(5): Representative Public Service

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are certain different departments in this government, if you look at the statistics, they have a pretty low percentage of aboriginal people within the department. I guess the concern here is at the deputy minister level. We do have aboriginal people who are deputy ministers. The number might be low in the assistant deputy minister positions and in the director positions. We have some departments that need more work. There are some departments that are doing fairly well in aboriginal representation in their departments in key positions. It is ongoing work that we have to do as a government, and we have to encourage these departments to take a closer look. It is going to have to be a key human resource strategy of each department to refocus and look at this area. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Premier. Final supplementary, Mr. Krutko.

Supplementary to Question 24-14(5): Representative Public Service

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I know we can make the scene look pretty rosy, but we all know there are very few indigenous people in this government at middle management and senior levels of this government. I believe that this government is not doing enough to put people in mentorship positions or offering them an alternative to industry for aboriginal governments. The federal government has more...

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Krutko, may we have a question please.

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, other organizations in the Northwest Territories have shown us the example that they can succeed, using the federal government as an example. Why is this government not following that example?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Deputy Premier, Mr. Antoine.

Further Return to Question 24-14(5): Representative Public Service

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, according to information I have, there are about 364 positions in total management in this government, and 61 of them are aboriginal people in management. That is 16.8 percent of total

people in management who are aboriginal. Women in management, there are 128 women in management. That is 35.2 percent. We are trying and we keep working. Where we started from and where we are at, we have made a lot of improvements.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that in looking for deputy ministers and looking for ADMs, there are certain qualifications that are required. Perhaps we should try some other approaches. There are different ways of doing this type of work in other areas. We have to explore and be creative and innovative at this level for aboriginal people. Try mentoring as an example. There are other ways in which we have to approach it, I agree with you. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Premier. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Question 25-14(5): Human Resource Management Policy

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in follow-up to these questions that are being asked about human resources management issues and the Affirmative Action Policy, I would – after hearing Mr. Ootes' responses and comments – like to ask the Deputy Premier, is there not a policy of the Executive which precludes Ministers from becoming involved in human resources issues within their department? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Deputy Premier, Mr. Antoine.

Return to Question 25-14(5): Human Resource Management Policy

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I will have to take that question as notice. It is kind of specific. I am getting advice all over the place but I have to be clear on the answer. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. The honourable Deputy Premier is taking that question as notice. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Deh Cho, Mr. McLeod.

Question 26-14(5): Health Program for Seniors

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask my question regarding health programs for seniors to the Minister responsible for Health and Social Services. I would like to know if the department has taken the time to review the programs in place for seniors in the last while? If so, when was the last time?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Return to Question 26-14(5): Health Program for Seniors

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this review is currently being finalized. It was one of the outstanding issues identified in the action plan and one of the strategies not yet complete. I would anticipate that within the life of this session, I will be making a statement and tabling the documents that will be the result of that work, as well as a response from the department and the government

in terms of how we intend to try to address the recommendations made that were arrived at through the interdepartmental working group and after extensive consultation across the North. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. McLeod.

Supplementary to Question 26-14(5): Health Program for Seniors

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is good to hear. I would like to ask the Minister if that would include issues such as dental care for seniors. It is my understanding that the cap for dental was placed at \$1,000 in 1989. I would like to know if that would be part of his review and there would be a consideration for an increase in that area? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Further Return to Question 26-14(5): Health Program for Seniors

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in fact, that particular issue would come under supplementary extended health benefits. Coincidentally, we have put out a request for proposals to review that particular program as well, because it is outdated. Dental days and the level of service have been identified as being in need of serious review. We are as well intending to look at that in as timely a way as we can. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. McLeod.

Supplementary to Question 26-14(5): Health Program for Seniors

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An area that many seniors have brought to my attention since I have been elected is the length of time that seniors have to wait, especially in the small communities, to have admittance to hospital and other medical facilities. I would like to know if the Minister would consider reviewing that whole aspect and consider utilizing some of the facilities in the south, especially if none of the hospitals in the North have any room or if the wait is longer than a certain period, for example, one week?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Further Return to Question 26-14(5): Health Programs for Seniors

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would be interested in talking with the Member to get a clear sense of the detail, the specific issues that he is referring to. If there is a problem with seniors accessing facilities as the Member has alluded to, then I would be very interested to look at how we can in fact address that. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. No further supplementary? Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Nitah.

Question 27-14(5): Impact Benefit Agreements

MR. NITAH: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, dealing with impact benefit agreements. Can the Minister give us an explanation of how impact benefit agreements became a reality in the Northwest Territories? When and how, Mr. Speaker?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nitah. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

Return to Question 27-14(5): Impact Benefit Agreements

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was not party to the agreements at the time of signing, but I will give you my understanding. They are agreements between a group of people and a private business here in the Northwest Territories, a public corporation. The impact benefit agreements are not public documents, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Nitah.

Supplementary to Question 27-14(5): Impact Benefit Agreements

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I understand those are not public documents. It is usually a band council representing their members, negotiating impact benefit agreements for the industry. My understanding is that in the early 90s when BHP was going through the environmental review process and the permitting process, the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs encouraged the Government of the Northwest Territories, who also encouraged the companies, to negotiate impact benefit agreements in lieu of devolution and revenue sharing based on treaties. If these impact benefit agreements are based on treaties, why is it subject to clawbacks?

The question, Mr. Speaker, is this: are these agreements based on treaties?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nitah. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

Further Return to Question 27-14(5): Impact Benefit Agreements

HON. JAKE OOTES: To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Speaker, they are not. They are an agreement between a group and a corporation. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Just to remind the Members that question period is almost over here and we have a big full list. Shorten your preambles. Mr. Nitah, supplementary.

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess if you could assume that any group could enter into negotiations with resource companies, why then is the City of Yellowknife not

negotiating with the Diaviks and BHPs? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: I am not sure whether that question is directed at the Minister. As the Chair understands it, he is not responsible for the City of Yellowknife. He is responsible for the territorial government. Would you like to rephrase that question, Mr. Nitah?

Supplementary to Question 27-14(5): Impact Benefit Agreements

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Based on the Minister's response to my question and his responses, it is groups of people negotiating with resource companies such as BHP and Diavik. Why then are there no other groups outside of the chiefs and councils, and possibly through the exception of the North Slave Metis Alliance? Why are other groups not negotiating with these companies if it is not an aboriginal right or treaty issue?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nitah. I will rule the question out of order.

-- Interjection

Is the honourable Member questioning the Chair? Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

Question 28-14(5): New Housing Program Details

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, along with my colleagues, Mrs. Groenewegen and Mr. Nitah, we were looking for some information on housing. My question is a follow-up to that to the Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation.

The Minister indicated that a potential investment of \$25,000 per unit would help put more affordable housing into the major centres. I would like to ask the Minister if he could provide any more details or criteria to the potential \$25,000 per unit offer? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. The honourable Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation, Mr. Allen.

Return to Question 28-14(5): New Housing Program Details

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I will try to clarify some of the responses I had yesterday in the context of the program. The \$25,000 cap can be integrated into the existing EDAP programs, or may be integrated into other home ownership programs, IHP, independent housing programs, or units that need to be upgraded, rehabilitated, and also may be used for capitalization for rental units. Those are some of the examples where it can be used.

The intent is that we want to keep the program as flexible as possible, that would meet their increasing demands, both in urban, rural and remote communities. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Braden.

Supplementary to Question 28-14(5): New Housing Program Details

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is good. I think we are getting some more information on it. The Minister also indicated that April 1st would be a roll-out, or an eligible date for that. Given the very active construction landscape in Yellowknife, would the Minister be able to announce any firm criteria prior to April 1st? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. The honourable Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation, Mr. Allen.

Further Return to Question 28-14(5): New Housing Program Details

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that the Minister of Finance has given his Budget Address earlier today, I am pleased to say that we do have an action plan for all the communities, including the regions. We want to distribute that prior to April 1st so that every Member has an idea of the impacts this new program will have in their communities or their constituencies. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Braden.

Supplementary to Question 28-14(5): New Housing Program Details

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to clarify a point that was discussed yesterday, is the \$25,000 program going to be available to private developers? If I wanted to build my own home, could I access it as well? Or is it more for developers aimed at multi-residential construction? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. The honourable Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation, Mr. Allen.

Further Return to Question 28-14(5): New Housing Program Details

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spoke to several factors earlier in the context of integration of this program. We see this as open to not only developers but private individuals who may want to access EDAP, for instance. That additional \$25,000 cap would be incorporated into that, the application process. So we want to make sure that we have all of the program permits fully developed here in the next couple of weeks for distribution. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Final supplementary, Mr. Braden.

Supplementary to Question 28-14(5): New Housing Program Details

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will try to seek one more bit of detail here. Will there be specifics or criteria, like a means test or an income level, before I could become eligible as a private builder to access this help? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. The honourable Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation, Mr. Allen.

Further Return to Question 28-14(5): New Housing Program Details

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, again, we are trying to keep it flexible, so we are going to incorporate it into the existing policies. We may have to revise some to meet the growing demand. It depends on which constituency is most affected. Again, hopefully when we get the action plan finalized and distributed it will outline the new criteria -- whether it is new criteria or enhancement to existing policies. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Question 29-14(5): Departmental Reviews Being Conducted

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was going to ask a question on affirmative action but, in fact, after hearing Mr. Miltenberger's response to Mr. Nitah, I have to direct my question to the Minister of Health and Social Services instead.

Mr. Speaker, I recently had occasion to read this very complimentary editorial about the Minister of Health and Social Services in a local newspaper, extolling his disdain for reviews and studies. I would just like to ask the Minister if he could outline for us the reviews that are currently underway by his departmental staff and by his department? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Return to Question 29-14(5): Departmental Reviews Being Conducted

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are currently in the process of trying to conclude the review of seniors' benefits, the Continuing Care Strategy, work for the disabled and there is also the one to be concluded with addictions and mental health. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Supplementary to Question 29-14(5): Departmental Reviews Being Conducted

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How many of these reviews are being conducted by outside consultants? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Further Return to Question 29-14(5): Departmental Reviews Being Conducted

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge, none of them are.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Supplementary to Question 29-14(5): Departmental Reviews Being Conducted

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is there not a review of information technology within the Department of Health and Social Services currently being undertaken? I believe there was a dollar value of approximately -- well, I will not get into the dollar value. Is that one that perhaps the Minister has forgotten about? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Further Return to Question 29-14(5): Departmental Reviews Being Conducted

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to thank the Member for jogging my memory. In fact, yes, that was another outstanding contract with Sierra Consultants. I believe it is in the quarter-of-a-million dollar range. This as well has yet to be concluded. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Final supplementary, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Supplementary to Question 29-14(5): Departmental Reviews Being Conducted

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Minister says "yet to be concluded" one would deduce that he is referring to something that was initiated before his time. Are there no outside contracts, perhaps somewhere in the vicinity of \$30,000, which this Minister has undertaken to procure? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

Further Return to Question 29-14(5): Departmental Reviews Being Conducted

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are engaged across the board with the implementation of the action plan in a whole host of areas, bringing to bear whatever resources may be required, so yes, there is work being done in some areas. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Hay River North, Mr. Delorey.

Question 30-14(5): Affirmative Action Employees

MR. DELOREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice and it has to do with affirmative action that we have been talking about here. I know, Mr. Speaker, that the Affirmative Action Policy is one that receives a lot of attention, in fact, from some affirmative action candidates that feel they are labelled because of this policy. I would like to know from the Minister of Justice if he could tell me how many affirmative action candidates are now employed. What percentage of employees in the Department of Justice are affirmative action candidates across the Territories? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Delorey. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Justice, Mr. Allen.

Return to Question 30-14(5): Affirmative Action Employees

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will provide the Member with exact statistics a little later on. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Delorey.

Supplementary to Question 30-14(5): Affirmative Action Employees

MR. DELOREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, does the department have a target for what they want to accomplish with the Affirmative Action Policy as far as the number of positions in the department they want as affirmative action candidates and what they think is achievable? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Delorey, a couple of questions there. Mr. Allen.

Further Return to Question 30-14(5): Affirmative Action Employees

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to return back to the original question, we have approximately 188 affirmative action candidates employed in the Department of Justice. We do have an action plan, Mr. Speaker, that we are working on to look at some revisions in our employee standards. Hopefully we will be able to continue to develop that and respond back to the Member. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Mr. Delorey.

Supplementary to Question 30-14(5): Affirmative Action Employees

MR. DELOREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did not quite hear an answer to either one of my questions there, but 180 is what percentage of all employees in the department in the Territories? One hundred and eighty would represent what percentage of the total employees? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Delorey. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Justice, Mr. Allen.

Further Return to Question 30-14(5): Affirmative Action Employees

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought I would reply in terms of real numbers. I do not have the exact percentage, so I will provide that to the Member. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Final supplementary, Mr. Delorey.

MR. DELOREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not know if the Minister can answer this question, but do we know how many people in the Territories are affirmative action employees, or are classified as affirmative action residents? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The question is so general. You are questioning the Minister responsible for Justice and we have to

stick to his department. In this case, the question is not within his area to respond to. Maybe you want to rephrase it to his department, but not for the whole territorial government. Mr. Delorey.

Supplementary to Question 30-14(5): Affirmative Action Employees

MR. DELOREY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will stick to the question then. Maybe the Minister could supply the percentage of people working in the department that are affirmative action candidates, and what percentage the department has for a target date as far as using the Affirmative Action Policy for. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Delorey. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Justice, Mr. Allen.

Further Return to Question 30-14(5): Affirmative Action Employees

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will attempt to provide a detailed answer to the Member. As of February 11th, Mr. Speaker, going back to the original question, 36.7 percent of Justice indeterminate and term employees were indigenous aboriginal persons, and 21.6 percent of Justice indeterminate and term employees were indigenous non-aboriginal persons. Mr. Speaker, I am not sure of the total numbers, but on the action plan hopefully, Mr. Speaker, we can then try to see where we can make improvements to facilitate the growing number of bottleneck positions and put aboriginal indigenous and non-aboriginal indigenous people into supervisory and management roles. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 7, oral questions. There are no further oral questions? I have no one on my list. The time for question period has ended anyway. Item 8, written questions. Item 9, returns to written questions. Item 10, replies to the opening address. Item 11, replies to the budget address. Item 12, petitions. Item 13, reports of standing and special committees. Item 14, reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 15, tabling of documents. Item 16, notices of motion. The Chair recognizes the honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Nitah.

ITEM 16: NOTICES OF MOTION

Motion 1-14(5): Establishment of a Special Committee on Rural Community Affairs

MR. NITAH: Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Friday, February 22, 2002, I will move the following motion.

Now therefore I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, that this Legislative Assembly establish a special committee to be named the Special Committee on Rural Community Affairs. And further, that the following Members be appointed to the special committee: Mr. David Krutko, Mr. Leon Lafferty, Mr. Michael McLeod, and myself, Steven Nitah;

And furthermore, that the terms of reference for the Special Committee on Rural Community Affairs be established as follows:

The Special Committee on Rural Community Affairs shall:

- consider and make recommendations on equitable distribution of GNWT resources to the Northwest Territories communities;
- consider and make recommendations respecting the preservation of social, cultural and spiritual traditions as they are represented in rural communities in the Northwest Territories;
- consider and recommend on any other matter that, in the opinion of the special committee, is within its responsibility respecting rural community affairs.

And further, the special committee shall conduct its business in a manner approved by the committee and in accordance with the rules of the Legislative Assembly and:

- which does not impinge or encroach on the mandate of any existing standing or special committees;
- be provided with the necessary administrative and professional support by the Legislative Assembly;
- have access to such persons, papers and records necessary to conduct its business; and
- be provided with the necessary funds to carry out its responsibilities and the appropriations of the Legislative Assembly.

Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Mahsi, Mr. Nitah. Item 16, notices of motion. Item 17, notices of motion for the first reading of bills. Item 18, motions. Item 19, first reading of bills. The honourable Minister responsible for Finance, Mr. Handley.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to proceed with the first reading of Bill 2, Appropriation Act, 2002-2003. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. The honourable Minister is seeking unanimous consent to proceed. Are there any nays? There are no nays. Proceed, Mr. Handley.

ITEM 19: FIRST READING OF BILLS

Bill 2: Appropriation Act, 2002-2003

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Mr. Speaker,

I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Nahendeh, that Bill 2, Appropriation Act, 2002-2003, be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. The motion is in order. All those in favour, please signify. Thank you. All those opposed? Thank you. The motion is carried. Bill 2 has had first reading. 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. Item 22, report of committee of the whole. Item 23, third reading of bills. Item 24, orders of the day. Mr. Clerk.

ITEM 24: ORDERS OF THE DAY

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Hamilton): Mr. Speaker, meetings tomorrow at 9:00 a.m. of the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight and of Cabinet House Strategy at 9:00 and at 9:30 of the Cabinet Financial Management Board meeting.

Orders of the day for Thursday, February 21, 2002:

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
5. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
6. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
7. Oral Questions
8. Written Questions
9. Returns to Written Questions
10. Replies to Opening Address
11. Replies to Budget Address
12. Petitions
13. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
14. Tabling of Documents
15. Notices of Motion
16. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
17. Motions
18. First Reading of Bills
 - Bill 1, Human Rights Act
 - Bill 3, An Act to Amend the Public Service Act
 - Bill 4, An Act to Amend the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act
19. Second Reading of Bills
 - Bill 2, Appropriation Act, 2002-2003
20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
21. Report of Committee of the Whole
22. Third Reading of Bills
23. Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until Thursday, February 21, 2002, at 1:30 p.m.

-- ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

