



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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The Honourable Tony Whitford, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Thursday, February 28, 2002****Members Present**

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

ITEM 1: PRAYER

-- Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Tony Whitford): Thank you. Please be seated. Good afternoon. Item 2, Ministers' statements. The honourable Minister responsible for Housing, Mr. Allen.

ITEM 2: MINISTERS' STATEMENTS**Minister's Statement 20-14(5): Policing in NWT Communities**

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it is a simple truth to say that we all want safer communities and we all have a role to play in achieving this. The RCMP have a significant role which creates high expectations. We expect the RCMP will respond to our calls for help. We expect them to take action when we are victimized by crime. We expect them to get involved in programs that reduce crime.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories has a vision for the future of policing in the NWT. It is one that includes improved access to police services and better coordination of restorative justice activities between the police and communities.

To achieve this vision requires a solid partnership between communities, the government and the RCMP. I believe that the Department of Justice has always had a positive relationship with the RCMP. I also believe that we are building good relationships with communities through our support for local justice activities. However, I do believe that we can do more to deal with the many policing issues facing us.

Mr. Speaker, officials from the department are working on a plan to deal with these issues and enhance the law enforcement capabilities of our communities. As part of this plan, we are examining ways to improve safety on the highways and to keep detachments in communities like Holman, Wha Ti and Paulatuk that only have one officer. We are also considering ways to improve the law enforcement capability of communities that do not currently have resident RCMP officers. As part of this process, we are looking closely at the needs of all communities. In the interim, the RCMP has assured us that they will increase the number and duration of their patrols to these communities.

Mr. Speaker, recently there have been reports that the Yellowknife detachment of the RCMP was not able to meet certain needs of the citizens of Yellowknife. In response to this report, a meeting was held last Friday between a senior official from the Department of Justice and the commanding officer of the RCMP "G" Division. I can report that this meeting was very positive. People will be pleased to hear that as a result of this meeting, there will be no immediate changes to the level of

policing provided in Yellowknife. This includes continuing to operate the DARE program.

The Government of the Northwest Territories is a strong supporter of DARE, which is the RCMP's Drug Abuse Resistance Education Program. This program is designed to give fifth and sixth grade students the skills they will need to help them stay away from cigarettes, alcohol and drugs. It also helps children deal with and avoid violence. This program is an excellent example of how police can work to reduce criminal behaviour before it starts. There is also a plan to bring this program to Hay River in the next few months.

While this addresses immediate concerns in Yellowknife, there remains a need to examine the resources dedicated to policing in all communities in the Northwest Territories. The Department of Justice will dedicate the necessary time and resources to come forward with a plan to deal with the many policing issues facing us. I expect to have this plan ready for Cabinet this June.

Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the residents of the Northwest Territories that we will continue to work closely with the RCMP and with communities to make the Northwest Territories a safer place to live and work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 2, Ministers' statements. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

Minister's Statement 21-14(5): Golden Jubilee for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, February 6th marked the 50th anniversary of Her Majesty The Queen's accession to the Throne. The Northwest Territories is pleased to join other provinces and territories across Canada in marking this Golden Jubilee year.

To celebrate this anniversary, and in keeping with our priorities and a desire to focus on youth and literacy, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment will be supporting a book project to stimulate children's imaginations and creative writing skills. Students from grades 1 to 12 will be invited to write a story they wish to share with Her Majesty. The best stories will be selected and published in a book that will be given as a gift to the Queen.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to add that a book of congratulations and a pictorial display, along with memorabilia of past royal visits, have been set up in the Great Hall for public viewing. On behalf of the Department of Canadian Heritage, we will be distributing 300 portraits of the Queen to public agencies and organizations across the Northwest Territories.

Later today, Mr. Speaker, I will be moving a motion of congratulations to Queen Elizabeth.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I invite Members of this House to join us and Commissioner Hansen at our break this afternoon to launch these initiatives marking the Queen's Jubilee. During this break, Commissioner Hansen will announce an additional initiative by her office to commemorate the Jubilee. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 2, Ministers' statements. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Justice, Mr. Allen.

Minister's Statement 22-14(5): Human Resources Action Plan

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, today I am very pleased to tell you about the progress that the Department of Justice is making to recruit, retain and advance priority one employees within the corrections services.

As we all know, Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of the offender population in our facilities is aboriginal. I believe that in order to provide effective and appropriate services to these offenders, the people working in our facilities should reflect the cultural diversity of the people they are working with.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say we have already made significant progress in this area. There are currently seven corrections facilities operating in the NWT. In six of these, more than 50 percent of the staff are priority one. In two of these six facilities, over 70 percent of the staff are priority one. In our probation services, 63 percent of the staff are priority one employees.

I am also pleased to inform you that many of these staff are in mid management or management positions. Right now, three out of the four managers of the young offender facilities are priority one employees. This is an excellent indication that affirmative action is progressing very well within the corrections services.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Justice wants to ensure this trend continues and that we are able to maximize the opportunities for our staff in the facilities. This is why I have asked the department to develop and implement a human resources action plan. This plan will provide our employees with training and development opportunities that will allow them to move forward in their careers with corrections. Through this plan, corrections employees will have the means to gain the skills and experience necessary to become leaders in the corrections field.

Mr. Speaker, I am very excited about this plan, as it will encourage and promote the leadership potential that our employees already have. Mr. Speaker, the development of this plan is a priority for me and for the Department of Justice. I expect to have a more detailed framework for the plan ready for discussion with my Cabinet colleagues in April 2002. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Yellowknife South, Mr. Bell.

ITEM 3: MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Member's Statement on Housing Assistance Programs

MR. BELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in the Northwest Territories, the responsibility for housing is primarily located within the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation. The mandate of the Housing Corporation is to assist communities to assume the role of providing housing to their residents and to sustain northern economic development.

Mr. Speaker, the corporation has a variety of programs that support public housing, home ownership and home repair programs. Some of the programs are the Extended Down Payment Assistance Program, also known as EDAP, the Independent Housing Program, EDAP Repair Program, Independent Housing Repair Program, Sale of Housing Materials Program, Northern Territorial Rental Purchase Program, the Sale of Public Housing Initiative, Seniors and/or Disabled Maintenance Program, and Elders on the Land Initiative.

Mr. Speaker, this is a long list of programs. On one hand, it sounds as if this government has at its disposal a variety of programs available to make home ownership and home repair affordable for many northern residents. On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, I wonder how much the average resident knows about the availability of these programs.

Mr. Speaker, there is a listing of programs of interest to seniors in the Seniors Information Handbook and there is some basic information on the corporation's website. I am concerned, Mr. Speaker, that perhaps the public is not very well aware that there are programs available, nor are they sure of who they should talk to about qualifying for assistance.

Other than news releases on programs when they are initially announced, we hear very little by way of advertising on programs that are available to assist members of the public with their housing problems. Not only do we need to advertise these programs, Mr. Speaker, but we need to let people know how to find out if they qualify. If these programs are expected to help people obtain and maintain affordable housing, Mr. Speaker, then let's go out there and let people know they exist and we are willing to help them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bell. Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for North Slave, Mr. Lafferty.

Member's Statement on Delegation of Authority for Housing Programs

MR. LAFFERTY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation has an agreement with the local housing authorities to manage their housing programs. The local housing authorities are responsible for administering the programs for homeowners and for assigning public housing rental units.

Mr. Speaker, the housing division is also responsible for completing repairs. MLAs are getting complaints from their constituents, Mr. Speaker, because they are not able to access some of the programs. I hear complaints that repairs are not being carried out on some of these units, even though the funding has been approved. There is a great concern about how the housing division is spending the money on programs and services.

Also, I would like to point out that another great concern of theirs is what kind of monitoring is being done by the housing division of this government. Mr. Speaker, I will be following up on this matter during question period. Thank you.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Member's Statement on Public Housing and Income Support Harmonization Initiative

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the harmonization initiative was undertaken because there was a need to make changes in how this government assessed income and set the rental rates for public housing and income support clients. The public housing program, administered by the NWT Housing Corporation, and the Income Assistance Program, administered by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, assessed financial needs in different ways.

There is also a need to ensure that the people with the greatest need receive assistance. The harmonization initiative brochure tells us that harmonization will ensure that eligibility for government support is determined in a fair and equitable manner. As I understand this, Mr. Speaker, this means that benefits to income support clients and low-income families will be improved, and I understand that it will also mean fairer public rent scales and, Mr. Speaker, I understand that there will not be disincentives to employment.

Mr. Speaker, in Hay River, there are over 100 public housing units. People occupying these units include students, single parents, seniors and low-income families. If, in the implementation of the harmonization, we see that there is in fact more equity, fairness and affordability, then I believe the positive benefits to those most in need will be welcomed.

During question period, I will be asking questions related to the positive results we can expect to see under harmonization. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

Member's Statement on Lack of Suitable Housing in Small Communities

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to call attention to some of the problems I see in my constituency because of the shortage of suitable, adequate and affordable housing. Mr. Speaker, because there is a shortage

of housing, I see low-income families sharing houses that are too small to begin with, leading to overcrowded...in some situations, the facilities cannot accommodate the number of people by the use of running water. Regarding the effect it has on those families with regard to the public safety, health and well being of these families.

What choice do these people have regarding large families and supporting their families and trying to realize that the lack of housing accommodation does have an effect on the family, especially in our traditional, aboriginal communities? There is a custom that continues on of sharing, caring and ensuring family support is there, right from the grandparents down to the children.

Mr. Speaker, it is very visible that homeless populations are increasing in our communities, where people are living in tent frames because they have been kicked out of housing units by this government.

The housing shortage does have a very important impact, not only on the lives of the people, but it is more visible in low-income families. Lack of affordable housing accommodation also has an impact on the community to devour programs and services by employing people from outside of the community and not having staff housing available for those people.

For example, professional people such as nurses and teachers find accommodation in our communities. In most cases, they have to share that accommodation with either each other or a few of the teachers and nurses to pay the cost of acquiring these houses in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this government has to add to the amount of affordable housing in our communities and not be in a position of selling off the remaining government-owned housing units in our small communities. If anything, they should be enhancing the program.

Mr. Speaker, the government has to address this important issue of housing problems. The people in the smaller communities face this challenge day in and day out. Mr. Speaker, I will be asking the Minister questions on this matter later. Thank you.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Mr. Dent.

Member's Statement on Overcrowding in Overnight Shelters

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have significant housing issues in Yellowknife. There are very few houses for sale and very few new ones being built, largely because of the high price of land. There are not many mobile homes on the market, although I understand we may soon see some development in this area. There are hardly any apartments or rental accommodations available. It is obvious that the market is tough for all income levels.

Mr. Speaker, you can imagine if people with resources are having trouble finding accommodation just what those who have the least are going through.

People who are single and homeless can go to either the Salvation Army shelter or the Women's Centre for overnight shelter. A year ago, their chances of being reasonably accommodated were pretty good. This winter, both shelters are full every night. In fact, Mr. Speaker, both shelters are filled over their capacity pretty well all the time.

For instance, at the Women's Centre, there are 24 to 30 people every night. This is in a place with nine beds that is funded for 16 people. Mr. Speaker, overcrowding, as we all know, can lead to violent situations. On occasion, the Salvation Army and Women's Centre may have to evict residents as a result, just to protect the others.

Mr. Speaker, we could end up with people who have no options for shelter during the coldest time of the year.

This is made worse, Mr. Speaker, by the RCMP shortage and their recent announcement that they will not have the personnel to respond to situations involving an intoxicated person. We are in danger of having someone freeze to death.

Mr. Speaker, Education, Culture and Employment, through their income support program, provides funding to these shelters. They will have to respond. They must fund more bed space and increased staff.

Mr. Speaker, I will be following up with the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment on this issue later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Dent. Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, Mr. Roland.

Member's Statement on Public Housing and Income Support Harmonization Initiative

MR. ROLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The harmonization initiative was originally conceived to resolve the differences between the way two departments of this government assessed income and thereby setting rents for people in public housing.

The harmonization initiative has been underway for two years now, Mr. Speaker. Every person who receives income assistance or is living in public housing will be affected by changes that are to be implemented under the harmonization strategy.

People who live in public housing include low-income working people and seniors on fixed incomes.

Mr. Speaker, this government has announced that those changes will take place on April 1st of this year. The problem is that we do not seem to know what the changes will be.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, we know that some people will see rent decreases and some will see increases, but even the people who will be affected by these changes are telling us that they do not know what this means. How much will their rent be?

Mr. Speaker, the Minister has stated that the corporation is looking at asking for a deferral on the implementation date. The department responsible for implementation of the

harmonization changes is still working to orientate their employees on how rent will be set for housing units and how income will be assessed for those tenants.

Apparently, this is not a simple process, Mr. Speaker. The people who are employed to calculate how much rent is going to be charged are struggling with the details. How then, Mr. Speaker, is a tenant supposed to get any information about the proposed changes?

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that the harmonization strategy is ready for implementation in its current state. Until this government knows what the implications are going to be and until the details are known, and until the tenants know exactly where they are going to stand, I urge the Minister to reconsider this initiative and how it is being rolled out. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Roland. Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Range Lake, Ms. Lee.

Member's Statement on Affordable Housing for Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the issue of housing shortages in Yellowknife. We are well aware that we are experiencing critical shortages in every area but today, I would like to speak on the need for housing for senior citizens in Yellowknife. I would like to do this by telling you a story of a woman in my riding who is a single woman and who was, until recently, on disability assistance. She is an ex-government employee.

She called me because she received a letter in January saying that when she turned 65 in February, she would not be eligible for the disability pension that she had been receiving. This was not a very nice happy birthday message for her. She tried to see if she could get into some other sort of housing, public housing, or in the Aven Seniors Centre. She was told that there was no room available and that the line-up had an indefinite list.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that she is an aboriginal single woman, originally from Mackenzie Delta, and she had worked for government for many, many years.

I think what we have here is unless you are a senior citizen who is retiring and who is lucky enough to have made payments on your house, or unless you have double income that could support a mortgage, there is just no way for you to have a home.

I tried to get some assistance for her through the Department of Health and Social Services and Education through income support to no avail. When I last talked to her, she had to sell her house in my riding and she has decided that she will move to Grand Prairie to be with her daughter. She was very sad about that because she is from here and she wants to retire here and there is no home for her to go.

I believe that this is just one of the stories around the city. I know there is a lot of need for housing for senior citizens. They are just not able to afford the kind of prices that are being asked in the private market. The government has to look at the shortage of housing in Yellowknife. I have not heard anything

that is positive. I will be pursuing this issue with the responsible Ministers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Nitah.

Member's Statement on Housing Renovation and Repair Programs

MR. NITAH: Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation has a number of programs that are intended to assist homeowners in keeping their homes in good repair. Many of my constituents qualify for this assistance.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that it is often difficult to get repair work done in some of the smaller communities, particularly those that do not have road access. There is no lumber or hardware store to purchase the needed supplies, for one thing.

For another, not all homeowners are able to do their own repairs, even if they did have the materials. Mr. Speaker, what these communities do have is a local housing authority that is responsible for public housing units. The authorities bring in supplies to fix the units they are responsible for and they employ people who can do the work.

The Minister of the Housing Corporation has stated on several occasions that programs need to be flexible in order to meet the needs of Northerners. Mr. Speaker, I am suggesting that such flexibility be applied in these cases.

I would like to suggest that the Housing Corporation consider making arrangements with the local housing authorities to carry additional materials and be allowed to assist local homeowners with repairs in the communities where it is appropriate.

This will save homeowners and the territorial government money in the long run, Mr. Speaker, by keeping homes in the proper order, even if they are not public housing units. You never know what the economy of a community is, but the individuals who are owners of their own home might be on the social envelope at any given moment. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the appropriate Minister. Thank you.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nitah. Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Deh Cho, Mr. McLeod.

Member's Statement on Public Housing and Income Support Harmonization Initiative

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in keeping in line with today's theme, I would like to speak about the harmonization initiative. I think I have made it clear that I have great reservations about the implementation of the harmonization strategy.

Like my colleague, the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, it was my understanding that the harmonization initiative was undertaken because there was a need to make changes on how to assess income and set the rental rates for public housing and income support clients.

Mr. Speaker, the way this program has been rolled out is causing real problems in communities that I represent. Some people are hearing for the first time that they may or may not have a rent increase in the next three months.

For example, can you imagine getting a letter from your landlord stating that your rent may go up in three months, but it may not go up either? At any rate, the letter should be considered as formal notice that something is going to happen in three months.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, when you go to local housing authorities and you ask if your rent is going to increase and by how much, no one can really tell you because they have not been trained, nor have they been informed of how to calculate the rent until sometime in March of this year, yet the family is told to be prepared for something to happen.

Can you imagine the stress that it is causing my constituents? Many of the seniors are wondering if their rent is going to go up. They are wondering if they are going to have enough money left over from their cheques to make payments on items they purchased a year prior to this initiative. Many are wondering if they will still have enough money to adequately support their families.

Mr. Speaker, in my mind, when you give someone three months notice of change in their rent, the notice must contain enough detail to all the family to make decisions and plan. I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that if a private apartment owner in Yellowknife tried to claim three months notice of a rent increase without telling the tenant how much that increase would be and that it constituted a proper notice, the MLA for that riding would be snowed under with complaints.

Mr. Speaker, this strategy I understand was inherited from the 13th Assembly. I am not satisfied that the details of the harmonization strategy have been fully debated in this Assembly. I believe the residents need to be informed of the ramifications of the new harmonization policies that will be applied.

I will be following up with the appropriate Minister during question period, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

Member's Statement on Infrastructure Funding for Housing Developments

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like the rest of Canada, the Northwest Territories is experiencing a shortage of affordable housing in many, if not all, of our communities. The Northwest Territories Housing Needs Survey for 2000, Mr. Speaker, highlights a greater need for renovations and repairs in the smaller communities and the need for solutions to affordability and overcrowding, particularly in our larger centres in Inuvik and Yellowknife.

In his budget address last week, the Minister of Finance offered some welcome news that will assist the private sector in developing rental accommodation by increasing the availability of reasonably priced and financed land for non-tax-based

communities. I support this direction, Mr. Speaker, but I think it can go further, especially at this time of accelerated development due to mining and oil and gas.

Mr. Speaker, in our larger centres, the Northwest Territories has a capable private sector involved in constructing and owning housing. I do not believe the government has a role in doing anything of a competitive nature. This would interfere unduly in the market.

Having said that, I believe there is room for governments, both territorial and municipal, to assist in providing up-front assistance in developing the infrastructure to help make the lots and the land more affordable. Specifically, Mr. Speaker, we are looking at building the roads and the water and sewer networks that we need for modern communities.

If these up-front development costs were lowered, Mr. Speaker, this reduces the amount of financing that a developer needs to arrange and that means lower rents and cost of land for tenants and homeowners. I believe there is room for this government to be innovative and build on programs that will help municipal governments make land more affordable by reducing those high, upfront infrastructure costs.

I will be asking the Ministers responsible more about this during question period. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. Item 3, Members' statements. Item 4, reports of standing and special committees. Mr. Dent.

ITEM 4: REPORTS OF STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Committee Report 4-14(5): Report on Adequate and Affordable and Suitable Housing for Residents of the Northwest Territories

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, early in the life of the 14th Legislative Assembly, Members developed the vision statement, Towards a Better Tomorrow. One of the shorter term goals that this Assembly set out as one of the key goals in the document is housing that is adequate, affordable and suitable.

Members of the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight tabled a copy of our progress report on plans and priorities when we stated that we would continue to pursue adequate housing for Northerners. This report is intended to bring forth some discussion points and to serve as a reminder that we have not yet achieved our objective of suitable, adequate and affordable housing.

Housing problems are typically sorted into three categories: suitability, adequacy and affordability. The definitions are nationally set and are used by the Government of the Northwest Territories in assessing housing problems. Suitability refers to the problem of overcrowding, or whether a household has enough bedrooms appropriate for the number of people. Adequacy refers to the physical condition of a dwelling, or whether a household has the basic facilities to provide a safe and healthy environment. Affordability problems exist when a household pays an excessive amount for shelter. A household

has an affordability problem if more than 30 percent of the household income is paid to shelter costs.

Mr. Speaker, it is not unusual to see adverse social and health impacts when any or all of these conditions are present in our communities. Overcrowding, lack of basic facilities such as hot and cold running water and indoor toilets can contribute to illness and lead to poor achievements

If a household is paying more than 30 percent of income on shelter costs, we know that families need to cut back on other necessities, such as healthy food and necessary clothing. In addition to overcrowding because of a lack of affordable housing, larger communities are seeing a growing problem of homelessness.

Lack of affordable rental accommodation in many of our communities, especially those experiencing economic growth, is creating an additional problem in an employer's ability to staff positions. Some of these positions, such as health workers and teachers, provide basic and essential services to residents, and the inability to staff positions because there is no suitable accommodation is an issue of concern to Members.

Mr. Speaker, the 2000 Northwest Territories Housing Needs Survey was completed by the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation in partnership with the Northwest Territories Bureau of Statistics, local housing organizations and communities, and was tabled by the Minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

The Minister's message states that the survey shows that there are 2,726 households in need in the Northwest Territories, or one out of every five households. The Minister goes on to say that not all communities have the same types of housing problems and need. I quote:

In some communities the need is for renovation and repairs to existing homes rather than for new homes. In larger centres such as Yellowknife, Inuvik and Hay River, residents face problems of affordability rather than overcrowding or condition of the home.

That is from page 2 in the Minister's message.

Mr. Speaker, household size suggests that crowding issues are improving. In 1981, approximately 13.9 percent of households contained six or more residents compared to 7.8 percent of dwellings with six or more residents at the time of the 2000 NWT Housing Needs Survey. The source is the Bureau of Statistics, 2001 socio-economic scan.

However, Mr. Speaker, there is still a need to improve the conditions of the housing units in the smaller communities and to have affordable housing available, particularly in the larger centres.

The harmonization project was initiated to clear up the differences in the way income and need were assessed by the public housing and income support programs. It was intended to ensure that eligibility for government support is consistent, fair and equitable and that government resources go to the people with the greatest need.

Mr. Speaker, Members have raised questions related to the implementation of harmonized assessments and consequential adjustments to the current rent structure.

The committee welcomes the news that Canada and the Northwest Territories signed an affordable housing agreement earlier this month. The agreement is aimed at helping to increase the supply of affordable housing. According to the joint press release issued on February 5, 2002, the \$7.5 million in new federal funding to be provided over a four-year period under this agreement will create an independent housing program that will enable low income families to access modest housing through home ownership and assisted rental housing, which will provide rent geared-to-income housing for low income seniors and singles.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has also highlighted this agreement in the 2002-2003 Budget Address. In addition, he announced that the Government of the Northwest Territories intends to help the private sector to respond to the demand for affordable rental accommodation in non-tax-based communities. Details as to how this will be achieved have not yet been made public, and members of our committee look forward to hearing more on this item.

The Gaps

Mr. Speaker, the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation is responsible for administering several programs to help families and individuals obtain homes to meet their specific needs. These programs include assisted rental programs and home ownership programs. Many of these programs are cost-shared with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The NWT Housing Corporation has \$48.5 million budgeted for the 2002-2003 year for support to programs and subsidies targeted at low and middle income Northerners. Although the corporation has a range of programs to assist individuals, families, seniors and people with disabilities, there appear to be gaps between program thresholds and the result is that some families in need may be falling through the cracks.

Mr. Speaker, the committee acknowledges and agrees with the statements made by the Minister responsible for Housing that program criteria need to be flexible in their application. That flexibility needs to apply to eligibility criteria for rental assistance programs; it needs to apply to the types of housing units that the corporation will approve under the home ownership programs, and it needs to apply in creative ways to assist homeowners to keep their houses in good repair. For instance, in communities where there are no private sector contractors to carry out repairs for private homeowners, perhaps local housing authorities could enter into arrangements with homeowners to provide materials and labour.

In urban areas such as Inuvik, Hay River and Yellowknife, the need is more focused on assistance to developers in order to lower the initial costs for new affordable housing. Because of the high cost of land development, sewer and water, there is an increase in the amount that a developer needs to borrow. This means increased borrowing costs, which in turn leads to higher rents or mortgages to the consumer in order that the developers may recover their costs within a reasonable time frame.

Economic Development and Job Creation

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight urges the government to move forward aggressively in developing affordable housing. We have, through letters and in our response to the review of the 2002-2003 Main Estimates,

already expressed concern that this government has not proposed significant new monies for new and existing programs in the 2002-2003 budget. In addition to providing much needed housing, the construction process itself affords an opportunity for jobs and for local economic opportunities. Mr. Speaker, spending money on capital projects in the communities provides job creation and a host of benefits for Northerners, not the least of which is a place to live.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes the report of the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight on adequate, affordable and suitable housing for residents of the Northwest Territories. You will have noticed that the housing theme ran through the Members' statements that were given earlier this afternoon. This report continues that theme of housing in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, that Committee Report 4-14(5) be received and adopted. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Dent. We have a motion on the floor. The motion is in order. All those in favour of the motion? Thank you. All those opposed? Thank you. The motion is carried. Committee Report 4-14(5) has been received and adopted. Item 4, reports of standing and special committees. Item 5, returns to oral questions. Item 6, recognition of visitors in the gallery. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Yellowknife South, Mr. Bell.

ITEM 7: ORAL QUESTIONS

Question 99-14(5): Housing Assistance Program Information

MR. BELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is directed to the Minister for Housing, Mr. Allen. What advertising or what information does the corporation make available to make the public aware that there are programs available to help them become homeowners or to repair their homes? Thank you.

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

Return to Question 99-14(5): Housing Assistance Program Information

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We use a number of methodologies. We use the local newspapers in some instances. We use the local TV stations in other instances. We also have flyers and brochures that are often circulated throughout the communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary to Question 99-14(5): Housing Assistance Program Information

MR. BELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Much of the information that is disseminated through the news media, TV, flyers, websites, these types of medium, is very general in nature, Mr. Speaker. I am wondering where members of the public can get more detailed information on these programs. Thank you.

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

Further Return to Question 99-14(5): Housing Assistance Program Information

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Besides the normal process of distributing information, we do have five district offices across the Northwest Territories. For the record, Mr. Speaker, we have the Mackenzie Delta/Beaufort district office in Inuvik. We have the Sahtu office in Norman Wells. We have an office in Fort Simpson, Hay River and we have the North Slave office here in Yellowknife, and also the headquarters in Yellowknife. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: We will now take a short break.

-- Break

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. The House will come back to order after a short break. We were on oral questions. The honourable Member for Yellowknife South was on his second supplementary. Mr. Bell.

Supplementary to Question 99-14(5): Housing Assistance Program Information

MR. BELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we broke, the Minister was telling us they do have regional offices that disseminate information. I guess what I would like to ask is if the corporation has someone in every community where a resident can go to get advice on what kinds of programs might be suitable for their needs and also to know what they might qualify for. Thank you.

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

Further Return to Question 99-14(5): Housing Assistance Program Information

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have program officers in each region that are attached to each community. They are responsible for providing the detailed information on every element of our programs. If there needs to be more, I am prepared to advocate the need for greater promotion of our programs in those communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary to Question 99-14(5): Housing Assistance Program Information

MR. BELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am wondering what kinds of efforts the corporation can make to help clients repair their homes if they do not qualify or do not quite meet the criteria. What does the corporation do? Thank you.

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

Further Return to Question 99-14(5): Housing Assistance Program Information

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We impose upon our staff to advise the clients of their eligibility. We try to

assist them through understanding the prerequisites to qualify for each individual program. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Question 100-14(5): Monitoring of Delegated Program and Service Delivery

MR. LAFFERTY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister responsible for Housing, the Honourable Roger Allen. I hear complaints from my constituents that they are not getting access to programs and services that the housing division is funded to deliver. What monitoring system does the corporation have to ensure that money is spent on programs and services? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Return to Question 100-14(5): Monitoring of Delegated Program and Service Delivery

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quarterly, the NWT Housing Corporation, through its agents, does a reconciliation of the local housing authorities operations. There have been some discrepancies that are pointed out to LHOs, and they in turn take corrective action. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary to Question 100-14(5): Monitoring of Delegated Program and Service Delivery

MR. LAFFERTY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The corporation is monitoring the funding and the reporting. How do they monitor whether programs are delivered or not? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Further Return to Question 100-14(5): Monitoring of Delegated Program and Service Delivery

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to speak in the context of some of the initiatives we are undertaking as a corporation, trying to give the communities more responsibility to deliver our services at the local level. Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, it is not always the most equitable way of doing it, but the intent is to work with the context of the proposed self-government agreements. Plus, we are still trying to work out some of the small errors that occur from time to time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary to Question 100-14(5): Monitoring of Delegated Program and Service Delivery

MR. LAFFERTY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that they have found some little errors out there. What steps are they taking to correct all that? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Further Return to Question 100-14(5): Monitoring of Delegated Program and Service Delivery

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are attempting to enter into a new agreement with the Dogrib Rae Band Housing Division. That agreement is to be signed on April 1st of this year. This will allow us a little time to look at some of the previous problems that may have been in that agreement. We will correct that as we continue to communicate with the MLA and also with the community. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 100-14(5): Monitoring of Delegated Program and Service Delivery

MR. LAFFERTY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Dogrib Rae Band is responsible for the housing division. They are also the contractor. Who do the constituents go to to complain about the programs, if they are delivered or not? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Further Return to Question 100-14(5): Monitoring of Delegated Program and Service Delivery

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The intention of this agreement is to have the clients go directly to the Dogrib Rae Band Housing Division first. If it does require additional attention, then I would propose they come to the NWT Housing Corporation. We will continue to work with the Dogrib Rae Band Housing Division. Thank you.

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

Question 101-14(5): Harmonization of Social Housing and Income Support

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister for Housing. In my Member's statement earlier, I said I expected to see positive benefits arising from the harmonization initiatives. There are approximately 113 public housing units in Hay River. I would like to ask the Minister if he can tell me approximately how many of these families in these units will see a rent decrease? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Return to Question 101-14(5): Harmonization of Social Housing and Income Support

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I am pleased to inform the Member that we will see 77 of the 113 getting a decrease, or approximately 68 percent of the tenants. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 101-14(5): Harmonization of Social Housing and Income Support

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That will indeed be welcome news for those tenants. That is two-thirds of the unit, so I assume the remaining one-third would see rent increases. Can the Minister give us some indication of how much rent increase that one-third will receive? Thank you.

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

Further Return to Question 101-14(5): Harmonization of Social Housing and Income Support

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Based on the formula, I am pleased to advise that approximately 25, or 22 percent of those tenants, will receive rent increases anywhere between zero and 100 on average. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 101-14(5): Harmonization of Social Housing and Income Support

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that only leaves a few people who will actually be seeing an increase in rent of more than 100 dollars per month. Will the Minister give us some assurance that tenants in public housing who will not be facing significant rent increases will not be caused to face undue hardship as a result of these increases? Are there any plans to consider phasing in increases for tenants who will be experiencing larger increases? Thank you.

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

Further Return to Question 101-14(5): Harmonization of Social Housing and Income Support

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have deliberately gone out and tried to identify those who would be adversely affected. We will be working with them on an individual basis to see what type of programs may fit. Some may be eligible under the Expanded Down Payment Assistance Program or the Independent Housing Program. It may vary throughout our existing home ownership programs.

We are pleased to advise the Members that we are going to be discussing this with them more thoroughly on a one-on-one basis. Thank you.

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

Question 102-14(5): Addressing Core Housing Needs

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for Housing. Mr. Speaker, I understand that core need is a key measurement the Housing Corporation uses to describe a household that has a housing problem, and that has a total income below the community core need income threshold.

According to the 2000 Housing Needs Survey, Aklavik had 33 percent of all households in core need. Fort McPherson is at 36 percent and Tsiigehtchic has 62 percent of the households described as being in core need.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister, how do you consider actions to be taken for communities where 62 percent of all households are described as being in core need?

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

Return to Question 102-14(5): Addressing Core Housing Needs

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I hear the question correctly, I do not have the specific outline of how they determine those who are in core need outside of floor space, that being the basic information I have at this moment. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 102-14(5): Addressing Core Housing Needs

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Can the Minister tell me what action his department is taking to address the housing problems in our small communities where there is such a large percentage of core need?

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

Further Return to Question 102-14(5): Addressing Core Housing Needs

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to advise the Members of this House that we are trying to develop several new initiatives to help alleviate the number of housing shortages and also overcrowding.

In the longer term, we are looking at some new senior housing initiatives as well as singles. We understand that is one of the major impacts we need to address. We also need to look at establishing other more affordable housing type programs, as well as market development in those communities that can afford to support a market.

We are also trying to work more in the context of research and development. That again is another initiative that we will be developing in the very near future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary to Question 102-14(5): Addressing Core Housing Needs

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister, will there be any new housing construction to replace some of these units that have very serious problems, where the cost to renovate is higher than building a new unit? Will there be new construction in our communities?

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

Further Return to Question 102-14(5): Addressing Core Housing Needs

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, definitely. We will replace those units that are beyond economic repair. We have allocated again a certain percentage of dollars to each community in our normal business process. That should help alleviate some of the problems.

Another positive area, Mr. Speaker, is we are now entering into a universal partnership agreement that allows, under the Corporations Act, for communities to determine their needs, rather than us determining their needs for them.

We are trying to open up and offer more flexibility to deliver those programs. Hopefully, the municipalities and other communities will work in partnership with the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation to fulfill those obligations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary to Question 102-14(5): Addressing Core Housing Needs

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister, given that he sees this as a definite need, how soon can a community be able to see physical construction and renovations on these units in our communities? When will we see construction?

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

Further Return to Question 102-14(5): Addressing Core Housing Needs

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is an ongoing process. Each new fiscal year the communities receive monies for new construction or modernization and improvement. Those monies are available each new fiscal year. It is just a matter of how the communities want to allocate that money to new construction or rehabilitation of existing units. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Mr. Dent.

Question 103-14(5): Funding to Address Homelessness in Yellowknife

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Mr. Speaker, we are approaching, if we are not there already, a crisis with the two shelters for single people in Yellowknife. The homeless numbers continue to grow. I know that Education, Culture and Employment has responded in part by covering more staff for one of these shelters, but it will not be enough.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister, so I am sure he will be prepared to meet with the operators to hear their issues, but will he commit to examining the funding contracts in light of the numbers of people seeking emergency shelter every night?

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

Return to Question 103-14(5): Funding to Address Homelessness in Yellowknife

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, there is a concern out there, and it has been there for some time, about the number of homeless people and where they are sheltered in the evenings.

Yesterday, the Premier announced that we would have a Minister to lead the issue of homelessness. Certainly I will do that and will be pleased to meet with the organizations. I will then in turn brief the lead Minister for homelessness, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 103-14(5): Funding to Address Homelessness in Yellowknife

MR. DENT: Mr. Speaker, in the long term, we need to give hope to homeless people that there is light at the end of the tunnel, that they will not be stuck in shelters with no hope. That means we need more healthy choices to help people get out of shelters.

Will the Minister work with the operators to expand on healthy choices available to the people who use the overnight shelters?

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

Further Return to Question 103-14(5): Funding to Address Homelessness in Yellowknife

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes. On income support issues, we have a productive choice. I think we need to work towards that for those who are homeless, so there is an opportunity for those people as well to improve their lives.

First of all, shelter is the primary issue, of course, but secondly, it becomes the case of can we find some means for them to

find a productive way to move back into society on a working basis, if that is what they are capable of doing?

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

Supplementary to Question 103-14(5): Funding to Address Homelessness in Yellowknife

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Minister for that response, because productive choices need to be broader, there is no question. Mr. Speaker, income support is also being delivered through the Women's Centre. Will the Minister reaffirm his commitment to this type of community-based delivery for income support programs?

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

Further Return to Question 103-14(5): Funding to Address Homelessness in Yellowknife

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no question that community delivery of income support can have a tremendous beneficial effect. There have been some challenges in order to do that. So far, we understand the delivery by the Women's Centre has proved very beneficial. I would like to certainly see that continue. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, Mr. Roland.

Question 104-14(5): Harmonization of Social Housing and Income Support

MR. ROLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is directed to the Minister responsible for the Housing Corporation. Early on in this harmonization process, seniors were consulted on their views. I am aware in Inuvik that approximately 60 senior citizens will be affected by the proposed changes. Almost 45 of those will see an increase in their rent.

I would like to ask the Minister if he would consider reviewing the harmonization strategy as it impacts on seniors in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

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

Return to Question 104-14(5): Harmonization of Social Housing and Income Support

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since we have taken a sincere approach and become sensitive to the points raised by the Member here, and which we have heard from the committee, that is why we are proposing a deferral of the implementation until October 2002, so it gives us the chance to begin more community consultations with those that originally felt it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary to Question 104-14(5): Harmonization of Social Housing and Income Support

MR. ROLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Did the Minister say that it is suggested that the deferral will happen until October?

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

Further Return to Question 104-14(5): Harmonization of Social Housing and Income Support

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would like to confirm that. We are proposing that it be deferred until October 1, 2002. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 104-14(5): Harmonization of Social Housing and Income Support

MR. ROLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will the Minister be able to confirm in fact that is the direction? He did say that it was proposed. We are still suggesting it. When will we know if in fact that is the direction in which the government is heading? Thank you.

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

Further Return to Question 104-14(5): Harmonization of Social Housing and Income Support

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, hopefully by next Thursday at the latest, Mr. Speaker, we can confirm in this House that it will be deferred. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 104-14(5): Harmonization of Social Housing and Income Support

MR. ROLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister inform this House and the residents of the Northwest Territories in fact if that does occur? Thank you.

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

Further Return to Question 104-14(5): Harmonization of Social Housing and Income Support

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we will confirm through a public forecast format and also through our district offices. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Range Lake, Ms. Lee.

Question 105-14(5): Housing Funding for Seniors and Low Income Earners

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today goes to the Minister responsible for Housing. It is with

regard to the case I had highlighted earlier in my statement, and it has to do with affordable housing for senior citizens and low-income singles, especially single senior citizens in Yellowknife.

Mr. Speaker, I see the project read by the Minister of Finance earlier in this session indicates that the Housing Corporation will benefit from \$7.5 million in federal money, and upwards of \$45 million in the next few years for housing in the Territories. I wonder if the Minister could indicate whether or not there is anything in there for senior citizens or low-income single people in Yellowknife? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Return to Question 105-14(5): Housing Funding for Seniors and Low Income Earners

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly we have considered all aspects of the demands, including seniors' and singles housing. We have developed initiatives for all, including homeownership, rental accommodation and those who are in need. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Ms. Lee.

Supplementary to Question 105-14(5): Housing Funding for Seniors and Low Income Earners

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe I only received half of the answer to my question. Could the Minister confirm whether or not in meeting those demands, any of that will take place in the City of Yellowknife? Did I hear that, Mr. Speaker?

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

Further Return to Question 105-14(5): Housing Funding for Seniors and Low Income Earners

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A comprehensive strategic plan addresses both market and non-market communities. That is the way we feel we can meet those critical challenges at this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Ms. Lee.

Supplementary to Question 105-14(5): Housing Funding for Seniors and Low Income Earners

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask a direct question again. Is there going to be any money spent in the city of Yellowknife in that plan? Yes or no, Mr. Speaker?

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

Further Return to Question 105-14(5): Housing Funding for Seniors and Low Income Earners

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, there will be money spent in the city of Yellowknife. As I indicated, it will be classified into two categories. One is market and one is non-

market. If the Member wants clarity on it, one is for tax-based and the other is for non-tax-based. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Final supplementary, Ms. Lee.

Supplementary to Question 105-14(5): Housing Funding for Seniors and Low Income Earners

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister indicate how much of the money that will be coming available will be spent in Yellowknife? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Further Return to Question 105-14(5): Housing Funding for Seniors and Low Income Earners

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is premature for me to give the exact amounts but I can assure the Member there is a fair amount that is going to be spent in Yellowknife, as well in the context of our new initiatives. Thank you.

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

Question 106-14(5): Local Housing Authority Repairs Program Delivery

MR. NITAH: Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for the Housing Corporation. As you know, Mr. Speaker, in a lot of our communities in the Northwest Territories, there is a one-stop shop, you could call, in terms of availability of supplies. Most of the stores are for groceries and day-to-day items. A lumber or a hardware store is something only to dream about, Mr. Speaker.

In that light, I would like to ask the Minister if he can tell me if he is aware of any reason that would prevent the Housing Corporation from making arrangements with the local housing authority to carry additional responsibilities, such as supplier or contractor services for those individuals who are not in public housing in communities where there are no retailers? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Return to Question 106-14(5): Local Housing Authority Repairs Program Delivery

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I hear the question correctly, the question is with regard to the procurement policy of the NWT Housing Corporation? If so, Mr. Speaker, we are prepared to carry additional lumber and additional hardware that would be supplementary to our own inventory, to give small homeowners in the communities access to glass or doors or whatever their small needs are. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary to Question 106-14(5): Local Housing Authority Repairs Program Delivery

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was hoping for a little bit more from the Minister in this area. I am not just thinking of emergency repairs, but as suppliers. Individuals want to change their flooring, put up new walls, et cetera. These individuals usually fall through the cracks in government programs and services. Could the Minister tell me why the housing authority at the local level cannot provide these kinds of services? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Further Return to Question 106-14(5): Local Housing Authority Repairs Program Delivery

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was under the belief that I did answer that specific question. I mentioned that the local housing authorities will carry additional supplies. Whether they are items I listed, I am not certain, but we are planning to introduce that as soon as possible and hopefully, for those off-road communities, have it barged in so that those people who require additional materials will have access to them. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 106-14(5): Local Housing Authority Repairs Program Delivery

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, would the Minister commit to making sure that information on such available services is communicated to individuals and communities prior to ordering supplies and bringing supplies into those isolated communities? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Further Return to Question 106-14(5): Local Housing Authority Repairs Program Delivery

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am not sure I can give certainty to that, simply because we do not want to go beyond the regular stores or whoever carries those kinds of items. Our intention is to have additional supplies, such as windows not normally carried through a supplier in that local community, to identify certain materials or hardware that would not otherwise be carried in the store. We would have those on the shelves so that the person who may need a new latch or a window can have access to that. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 106-14(5): Local Housing Authority Repairs Program Delivery

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the supplies that may be available today, such as latches, windows, doors, door handles, et cetera. I am concerned when my constituents in Lutselk'e have to use their

own boats and come over here, overload their boats and take them back to the community to fix up their homes or do complete renovations to their homes, Mr. Speaker. These people cannot afford to buy all at once, so they do it bit by bit.

What I am hoping to hear from the Minister is that he will commit to the small communities that do not have hardware stores that the housing authority will act as a contractor and supplier for major home renovations, and not just trinkets. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Further Return to Question 106-14(5): Local Housing Authority Repair Program Delivery

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize if I am laughing, but I do not think it requires a commitment. I think it requires common sense that where there is no other outlet in the community, we can carry those additional supplies. Those who are getting merchant repair programs or other repair programs, that automatically goes into the community during the barge season, so if there are additional requirements needed for those that do not qualify that specific year, yes, we can talk to them and make sure that we carry the additional materials and supplies that would help them through another season. Thank you.

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

Question 107-14(5): Implementation of the Harmonization Strategy

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is also for the Minister of Housing. Yesterday, the Minister told us in the House that he would be taking the harmonization strategy proposal to delay the implementation of the strategy to Cabinet. Mr. Speaker, I am not satisfied that this strategy has been debated in this Assembly. I would like to ask the Minister if he would commit to a full debate on the question of whether or not the strategy should be implemented at all, not just delayed? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Return to Question 107-14(5): Implementation of the Harmonization Strategy

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is probably a question that could be answered by this Assembly. We have an obligation to present it not only to standing committee but also to the Assembly. If I may respond in this way, perhaps the Member would consider introducing it into committee of the whole for debate. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 107-14(5): Implementation of the Harmonization Strategy

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would consider introducing it into committee of the whole. However, I need the Minister to table the strategy in this House to stimulate discussion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Further Return to Question 107-14(5): Implementation of the Harmonization Strategy

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been advised that we have taken it back for review, so once that review has been completed, we will be prepared to table it in this House. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 107-14(5): Implementation of the Harmonization Strategy

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister has indicated that he has taken the joint position paper back to Cabinet for approval. It is my understanding that he is looking for a deferral. The details of the strategy are already done. It is my understanding they were done because they were prepared to introduce it and implement it April 1st. Why can he not table that information?

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

Further Return to Question 107-14(5): Implementation of the Harmonization Strategy

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, with all due respect to the Member, we are not only looking at the time lines but also, we need to look at several other options in the context of how we are going to deal with those clients who are adversely affected. We need to take additional time to put together an amended strategy here for those persons adversely affected. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary to Question 107-14(5): Implementation of the Harmonization Strategy

MR. MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, the notices have already gone out into the communities. That would lead us to believe the policy has already been developed. By the Minister's response, I would have to ask, is he also reviewing the policy along with the possibility of deferring it until October 1st? Thank you.

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

Further Return to Question 107-14(5): Implementation of the Harmonization Strategy

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It also requires some review to see how we can adapt the various components of that policy, to see which really applies into which community and take a closer look at those who would be adversely affected, those who we have to speak to one-on-one to see where we can fit them into other programs. That is the intent of my reason for trying to defer this implementation. Also, we need to look at the overall communication strategy. How are we getting the information out to the communities and the people who are affected? We have heard this today, so I want to assure the Member that I am prepared to propose a deferral so that we can look at all of the elements, which is going to really affect the citizens of our Territory. Thank you.

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

Question 108-14(5): Options for Land Development Assistance

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to spread the information around a little bit and direct this question to the Minister for Municipal and Community Affairs, our colleague, Mr. Steen. I would like to ask what options does the department or the government have to assist tax-based communities in land and infrastructure development? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, Mr. Steen.

Return to Question 108-14(5): Options for Land Development Assistance

HON. VINCE STEEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, MACA has two programs for tax-based communities for land development. One is a water and sewage program. We can assist the communities through that process, whereby at the present time, we are cost-sharing this with the federal government and the tax-based municipalities, where the combined government contribution, both federal and territorial, would be 50 percent of the total project and the rest is from the tax-based municipality.

The second program is relative to what I mentioned previous to the Member, that we offer debentures. Other than that, we have nothing developed at this time. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 108-14(5): Options for Land Development Assistance

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the Minister for that response. Those seem to be relatively conventional programs and will take some time to plan and put into place. The pressure on at least two of our communities because of the accelerated activity I think demands more information. I wanted to ask the Minister just what kind of innovations can they look at to assist communities that have a demand now for more land? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, Mr. Steen.

Further Return to Question 108-14(5): Options for Land Development Assistance

HON. VINCE STEEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, MACA would be prepared to respond, or we are open to requests from the municipalities for extraordinary funding, which we may be able to use that process or that program in order to assist with immediate requests from tax-based municipalities. However, that is not a large fund that MACA has. To go over and above that funding would require us to go to FMB. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 108-14(5): Options for Land Development Assistance

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is not just something that is right now at the doorstep here in Yellowknife and Inuvik. I think with the kind of development we are anticipating across the NWT, this will be something other communities will also face.

Has the department done any kind of scan or forecast of the kind of pressures that will be under in other communities as development proceeds? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, Mr. Steen.

Further Return to Question 108-14(5): Options for Land Development Assistance

HON. VINCE STEEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I believe I said before, MACA has a budget and a program in place for non-taxed based communities, to assist them with land development, including land development in response to economic development activity within the region. We do not have the ability at this point to apply this program to tax-based communities. At this point, I am not able to give the Member any figure that I could offer him as to how I can assist tax-based communities under this program. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 108-14(5): Options for Land Development Assistance

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a related area, we must also as a government not only look at satisfying the demands that are at our doorstep today, but looking ahead to the future, we are making sure we can maintain this kind of infrastructure.

Is the government prepared to look at shortfalls that the city of Yellowknife has today with its Infrastructure Replacement Program? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. The honourable Minister responsible for the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, Mr. Steen.

Further Return to Question 108-14(5): Options for Land Development Assistance

HON. VINCE STEEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, MACA has put the request to the tax-based communities to identify their long-term needs for replacement of water and sewage facilities.

Once we have those figures from the different communities, we can then put together a program as to how we can continue to assist the communities over and above what we have at this time, ongoing with the feds.

We are waiting for a response from the tax-based communities on their long-term needs for water and sewage facilities. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item 7, oral question. The honourable Member for Range Lake, Ms. Lee.

Question 109-14(5): Housing Shortages in Tax-Based Communities

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question again goes to the Minister for Housing, regarding the critical shortage of affordable housing and lots in the city of Yellowknife.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the Minister is aware in the budget that the government has announced some relief programs. It says here on page 14: "The GNWT intends to help the private sector to respond to the demand for affordable rental accommodation in non-tax-based communities." The whole half of this housing initiative -- actually, it is a very small section, but all of it has to do with non-tax-based.

I want to know, Mr. Speaker, what is his plan for tax-based communities, to help them with their housing shortages?

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

Return to Question 109-14(5): Housing Shortages in Tax-Based Communities

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was once asked what was my vision of the NWT Housing Corporation, and I said that we want to develop parity in home ownership across the Northwest Territories and we cannot discriminate against a taxed or non-tax-based municipality. Thus, I want to inform the Member that we have given full consideration to introducing EDAP, the Extended Down Payment Assistance Program, into the city of Yellowknife as a measure to overcome some of the housing shortages and the major impacts. Again, it is raised in the context of those who are at the top end of a public housing scale and we need to move them into some form of home ownership. That is one of the key areas we are currently exploring.

I just have not had a chance to introduce that as yet. I am prepared to do that in the new fiscal year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Ms. Lee.

Supplementary to Question 109-14(5): Housing Shortages in Tax-Based Communities

MS. LEE: How about, Mr. Speaker, for the fact that the cost of developing lots in Yellowknife is so expensive that any of the existing lots would cost upwards of \$80,000? If there are any houses built on those lots, the housing prices will be above \$300,000 and not eligible for CMHC mortgage. Most people cannot afford a \$300,000 house. Has the Minister given any consideration to that predicament in Yellowknife? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Further Return to Question 109-14(5): Housing Shortages in Tax-Based Communities

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to go back into a bit of the history here, because back in June of last spring, we had met with the city, where they acknowledged that there was a land cost crunch. Thus, we have begun a process of communicating through MACA and the NWT Housing Corporation to see, because under the Housing Corporation Act, we can assist in the land development costs.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is still an ongoing evaluation and hopefully, we can come to some form of conclusion in the new fiscal year. We understand the type of investment we need to make in the context of EDAP, IHP or other affordable housing initiatives. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Supplementary, Ms. Lee.

Supplementary to Question 109-14(5): Housing Shortages in Tax-Based Communities

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, down payment assistance for low-income families -- I guess there is room for that, but that is not going to do anything for the fact that developers are not willing to develop lots in Yellowknife because it just does not pay to do so.

This has been a problem for a long, long time. Why is it that the Minister is saying he is working on it and we just have to hang on and wait until he has decided that he has done it? Does he not see that this is a very crucial emergency, an imminent problem? Has he not come to that realization, Mr. Speaker?

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

Further Return to Question 109-14(5): Housing Shortages in Tax-Based Communities

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to extrapolate a sentence that I should have used in my preamble:

The NWT Housing Corporation recognizes its role in providing affordable, social rental housing and home ownership options, as well as assisting with the development of private housing markets.

Mr. Speaker, we have been in consultation with the developers. We understand the predicament they are in. So are we. The cost of developing housing in the city of Yellowknife specific to land only almost exceeds the cost of putting a house on the ground. The less we are required to evaluate the cost of land, the cost of the house is the overall....it is true. That is where we are having problems with some of our clients falling through the cracks because they cannot afford to maintain that household, even though we can give them a fairly good subsidy.

I wanted to let the Member know that we have looked at all the possibilities. We still need to finish off evaluating the balance of the problems. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Final supplementary, Ms. Lee.

Supplementary to Question 109-14(5): Housing Shortages in Tax-Based Communities

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Minister should be aware that the time for evaluation is quickly running out. I think he has to admit that he is not going to do anything for the next fiscal year, because there is nothing in this budget that would do anything for tax-based communities. It says right here, all these programs are for non-tax based. So has he not already made a decision that he is not going to do anything for Yellowknife?

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

Further Return to Question 109-14(5): Housing Shortages in Tax-Based Communities

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I said earlier that I believe in parity. The vision of the NWT Housing Corporation is to treat all citizens of the Northwest Territories equally. One of the areas we looked at very closely and we will continue to work with market communities is in the context of EDAP. We may at some point house those people who are in need and that we do not see the residents of Yellowknife treated any differently than somebody from a smaller community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Question 110-14(5): Harmonization Notice to Local Housing Authority

MR. LAFFERTY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Housing, the Honourable Roger Allen. During the first phase of harmonization when it was advertised in the papers and out in the Northwest Territories, the North Slave office in Yellowknife sent a message to the local housing authority in Rae-Edzo, saying if they are not happy with the harmonization, to tell their MLA, because it was the MLAs who were raising the rent. Can the Minister tell me why there was a verbal phone call to the LHO and nothing written? Thank you.

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

Return to Question 110-14(5): Harmonization Notice to Local Housing Authority

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to clarify, there was some misinformation at the beginning of the communication strategy. That has been cleared up. That phone call should never have been made. I believe that corrective action has been taken. I believe the LHOs are now informed of their roles and responsibilities in the proposed harmonization policy. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 110-14(5): Harmonization Notice to Local Housing Authority

MR. LAFFERTY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the rumours are out there that the MLAs all had something to do with the increase in rent for seniors and single families, can the Minister tell me if he will take corrective actions and make a public release that this is not the case? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I apologize, but I must ask the Member to repeat his question. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Allen. Mr. Lafferty, would you repeat that for the honourable Minister?

MR. LAFFERTY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is pretty hard to do again, I did not have anything written. I will try to do my best. My question was if the Minister can take corrective actions for his department's misinformation to the communities and to the public, saying that it was the MLAs' initiative and not anyone else's. If they can take corrective action in a public release or through public information. Thank you.

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

Further Return to Question 110-14(5): Harmonization Notice to Local Housing Authority

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we are prepared to do is advise all of the LHOs that we are in the process of proposing a deferral on the harmonization strategy. Once that is completed and approved, we will then put out a full communiqué to all of the LHOs and the tenants advising them of our decision. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 110-14(5): Harmonization Notice to Local Housing Authority

MR. LAFFERTY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rumour is in Rae-Edzo that if you are not happy with the harmonization, it is your MLA's fault. I would like to ask the Minister if he can take corrective actions to let the public know, not just the LHOs, because they are the ones that started the rumour. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. I am a little puzzled about that question, whether or not we are dealing with a rumour here. The honourable Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation, Mr. Allen.

Further Return to Question 110-14(5): Harmonization Notice to Local Housing Authority

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, in the interim, we will put out a communiqué informing that it was not the MLAs suggesting that the people contact them, we will redirect, saying that they contact the LHOs or the district offices for further clarification. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Question 111-14(5): Repair Program Delivery by LHOs

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Housing Corporation to follow up on my earlier questions in the House today. Can I get the Minister to reiterate his last answer to my last question on the need and the willingness of the department to use the local housing authority as a contractor and supplier for people in those communities who are not in public housing, but are in need of major renovations to their homes? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Return to Question 111-14(5): Repair Program Delivery by LHOs

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To clarify my previous answer, I indicated that the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation is prepared to procure additional supplies and building materials, or whatever is needed that cannot be procured from an existing store or through existing means. We will provide that, providing we have an itemized list of the materials that are required. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 111-14(5): Repair Program Delivery by LHOs

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that would be of great benefit to people living in isolated communities that do not have existing stores they can go to. With more employment through development happening, we will see more people working in the communities who are not going to be able to qualify for public housing.

The GNWT is getting out of public housing, as is reflected in the harmonization proposal. Most public housing that has been transferred already is old or in need of major renovations. Knowing that the affordable housing is categorized as 30 percent of household income, Mr. Speaker, and most people working in smaller communities do not even have pocket change most times, because of commitments they have made in other areas, I would like to ask the Minister, would he consider a financing arrangement to go along with the services he has committed to? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Further Return to Question 111-14(5): Repair Program Delivery by LHOs

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I cannot commit to any type of financing arrangement to what we have indicated earlier, but I am prepared to review that and see what is most equitable for that specific community. Thank you.

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

Supplementary to Question 111-14(5): Repair Program Delivery by LHOs

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it would do well for the Minister to review it. In most cases, the banks have a hard time lending money on property that is owned in the small communities. It is hard for the bank to retrieve any money if they renege on it, and the fact remains, Mr. Speaker, we cannot go to the bank sometimes.

The Business Credit Corporation allows business to go to them after they go to the bank as a last resort. Would the Minister commit to reviewing this in that nature? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Further Return to Question 111-14(5): Repair Program Delivery by LHOs

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am prepared to review it in the context of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation Act, under the specific section. I am committed to doing that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary to Question 111-14(5): Repair Program Delivery by LHOs

MR. NITAH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Minister's commitment to review, but I would like to ask if the Minister would be willing to amend the act if the act does not allow for this to happen. It is needed in the communities. Essential repairs will save them money in the long run, Mr. Speaker.

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

Further Return to Question 111-14(5): Repair Program Delivery by LHOs

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the act already permits certain portions of the question the Member raised. We can provide loan guarantees, we can provide grants to the communities and to non-profit organizations. I believe

the act does allow us to do certain parts of what the Member has asked. Thank you.

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

Question 112-14(5): Residential Tenancy Act Provisions

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to let the Minister responsible for the Housing Corporation off the hook and ask the Minister for Justice to take this next question.

Mr. Speaker, the Northwest Territories Residential Tenancy Act provides for certain provisions of notice to tenants about increases in rent. When the harmonization program was announced a few weeks ago, notice did indeed go out, but it did not, Mr. Speaker, have any indication of the size or the actual amount of the increase the tenants were going to face.

Indeed, the act goes on to specifically exclude agencies responsible for public housing from giving -- in fact, I think even giving notices, the way I look at it. My question, Mr. Speaker, is why does the Northwest Territories Residential Tenancy Act allow housing agencies to avoid telling tenants the actual amount of proposed increase? Thank you.

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

Return to Question 112-14(5): Residential Tenancy Act Provisions

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am familiar with the required statutes that would require the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation to advise its tenants that there will be an increase in rent, but it does not say the exact number. I am just going back to the Member's question. I understand that we are entitled to advise the tenants that they are eligible to be increased up to the economic grants that are established for a specific community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary to Question 112-14(5): Residential Tenancy Act Provisions

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not know if that actually gives tenants the information they really need, which is to know the exact amount of increase they are dealing with.

I want to ask the Minister, is it fair and in the spirit of the act that housing agencies are permitted to avoid telling tenants what the extra cost is going to be? Is it fair?

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

Further Return to Question 112-14(5): Residential Tenancy Act Provisions

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the Member on the spirit and intent, although I do not have the specific details to the question. I am prepared to provide a detailed answer as soon as possible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary to Question 112-14(5): Residential Tenancy Act Provisions

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the indication that there is some imbalance here, perhaps some mistreatment, would the Minister then consider changes to the act to give a better notice and fairer treatment, Mr. Speaker, to tenants in public housing? Thank you.

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

Further Return to Question 112-14(5): Residential Tenancy Act Provisions

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am prepared to do a comprehensive review of the statute, ensure that our public housing tenants are well aware of their rights, and then communicate that back to the Member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary to Question 112-14(5): Residential Tenancy Act Provisions

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This will be welcome. I note that here in Yellowknife, I think we have about 275 tenants in public housing. More distressing than that is there are about 150 on the waiting list. This is something that I think is overdue.

Would the Minister be able to advise, is this something that we could see before the conclusion of the term of this Assembly? Thank you.

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

Further Return to Question 112-14(5): Residential Tenancy Act Provisions

HON. ROGER ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will acknowledge the request and make a concerted effort to respond to the Member prior to the conclusion of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. The time for question period has ended. Item 8, written questions. Item 9, returns to written questions. Item 10, replies to the opening address. Item 11, replies to the budget address. The honourable Member for Range Lake, Ms. Lee.

ITEM 11: REPLIES TO THE BUDGET ADDRESS

Reply 2-14(5)

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this being the seventh day of seven days we are allowed to respond to...

MR. SPEAKER: Ms. Lee, I am sorry. I would ask for your indulgence. We are going to take a break here to attend the events in the Great Hall, and you will have the floor when you come back. The House will adjourn for a short break to attend

the events in the Great Hall and come back at the sound of the bell.

-- Break

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. The House will come back to order after the short break. Item 11, replies to budget address. The honourable Member for Range Lake had the floor at the time. The honourable Member for Range Lake, Ms. Lee.

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues. I would just like to take this opportunity on the seventh day of the seven days that we have to reply to the budget address. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance for the last couple of weeks must have been quite bored because there have not been that many questions or criticism about this budget.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that in general and on balance, this was a good news budget. It had a lot of good things in it that we ought to be grateful for. One of the things is the infusion of money that is going to day care. I think that the government should be commended for the money it has allocated to support the parents who are having to place their kids in day care.

I also think the tax credit that the Minister of Finance brought in last year and additional money for this year is good news. I know I have been getting calls from constituents who are experiencing an increase in rent, and I know that the tax credit will go a distance in helping them with their cost of living.

I think, though, as I have indicated in the House, that we still are experiencing one of the highest fuel prices for our cars and heating houses. We have also experienced quite a large increase in power rates, and we also pay, in Yellowknife and the rest of the Territories, one of the highest income taxes still. We still have a lot of work to do, but I do want to congratulate the Minister for giving us a break on our taxes.

I would also like to commend the government for the extra money that it has come up with for recreation and sports for youth, as well as \$1 million for the youth corps. I am looking forward to seeing the details of these programs to see how they are going to benefit the youth. I think we are having a serious problem everywhere, not just in the communities but even in the city of Yellowknife.

I had a "Coffee-on-me at Tim Hortons," where constituents could come in and talk to me about the issues that are important to them. One of the merchants at Centre Square came and told me that the problems with the kids in the mall in Yellowknife is something that we have to look into. We have dozens and dozens of kids who are spending time, sometimes during their school time, at the mall hanging about and not having anything to do. This lady, this merchant, told me that she has helped somebody do homework. She has had parents who are dropping off their kids at the mall so they could spend the day there. We need things for the youth to do. We need recreational facilities in Yellowknife, as well as in communities, so I am looking forward to working with the government to work out how we are going to spend this money for the benefit of the youth.

I would also like to congratulate the government on the progress it has made on maximizing northern employment. I think it has been a great thing for the summer students and

university graduates to get internship programs so that they could have access to employment. I know that the young kids when they get out of university often have a hard time and find barriers in getting jobs in their chosen field. Often they are told they do not have any experience so they cannot get a job, and you cannot get a job if you do not have experience, so they get into this vicious cycle. I am really happy with the program that helps kids make the transition from school to work.

I would also like to thank the Minister of Finance for not introducing another scheme like the hotel tax, a highway toll or something like that that takes us on a travelling road show where we have to go to the people and ask what they think of this tax, and everybody beating us up on what they think of it. I would like to congratulate the Minister, but on the other hand, every time he comes up with an idea like a highway toll or hotel tax, he gets a resounding no from the people and then he finds the money from within, so we end up benefiting from that. Maybe these schemes are not such bad things after all, and any opportunity I get to go to communities to hear what they have to say, I welcome. I guess you can never please politicians all the time.

I would like to put on record that I really do support the idea of a bridge over the Mackenzie River.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

MS. LEE: I had great support from the people at Tim Hortons. Everyone is excited about this idea, but also someone said that the devil is in the detail, so we have to work out the details. I think it is an idea that is long overdue, and we should work together to see this a reality.

One of the things that I really like about this idea of the bridge over the Mackenzie River is this is being spearheaded by the Fort Providence Betterment Society. I think any time there is a community group in a smaller community outside Yellowknife that has an idea and that has an interest in seeing resource development take place outside their community and Yellowknife where we can mutually benefit, that is a good idea and we should support that. I will encourage the Minister and the government to pursue that option and make it happen in any way possible.

Mr. Speaker, for the remainder of my time, I want to talk about the area of education and infrastructure funding for the city of Yellowknife. Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the record of this government in the efforts it has made to reduce the PTR and for having given extra funding to school systems. However, what I still do not understand is how we have apparently met the target of the PTR as legislated in a much earlier time frame than we had thought, yet in classes, we see crowding in schools. There are a lot of theories about that. It is because Yellowknife is being funded at the NWT average, or the PTR is not the same thing as class size. We heard that over and over again when the Youth Parliament was here, and there is all these semantics and war over semantics going on, but I do not really care what the theory is.

When I am sitting with the parents' advisory group at Range Lake school, they tell me that their classes are just too big. If we have legislation that is funding the schools at 16.5:1, but in reality classes have 28 to 30 students, there is a problem there. I have gone to grade 2 and 3 classrooms at Range Lake school, and the kids have to be told how to exit the classroom.

The way the class desks are laid out, it is so crowded. I do not know if it is the way the school is built. I have been told that it is up to the local boards to decide how they are going to spend the money and so on, but for the parents in my constituency I do not think they have to care about rhymes and reasons why it is that their classrooms are heading towards the number of 30.

They do not have enough assistance with the special needs students in class. It only takes one or two students who need extra help and are not getting it to really put demands on the class. We really have to look at that. I know we have local school boards and other groups that have a say in the management of our schools, but as a legislator, I think the Minister, the government and all of the Members here are accountable for that. We have classes that are integrated in three or four grades in communities. Even in Range Lake, we have a lot of classes where one, two, three, four, five or six are all combined, and it is really taxing the resources to the maximum.

I guess we could pat ourselves on the back and say, "Wow, look at what we have done." We have reduced the PTR rate on paper, but I think what is important is what is out there in reality. We have to continue to work on that to make sure that our kids get the kind of education they deserve.

Another thing is that recently, I saw the stats in the paper where the Yellowknife Catholic school system and YK No. 1, all the schools are on the verge of 100 percent capacity. Almost all the schools are getting totally crowded. As far as I know, there is no plan or no reserved land for schools that we could count on. We are only looking at the next three to five years before we see that we are going to have to build more schools in Yellowknife. I need to bring that to the attention of the Minister and the government so they are paying attention to this.

The last thing I want to say, Mr. Speaker, has to do with the infrastructure funding for the city of Yellowknife. Mr. Speaker, we all know that Yellowknife is in the middle of an economic boom, as are some other cities, like Inuvik. Our resources in Yellowknife are really being taxed to the max.

Mr. Speaker, I had a chance to observe the traffic on Old Airport Road the other day because I had to go and fix my skidoo. It was like the middle of the afternoon with no special circumstances, and there was so much traffic on that road. That road cannot handle the traffic that we have. We need to divert the traffic somewhere, whether to Kam Lake Road or somewhere. I know that the City of Yellowknife is experiencing a reduced budget on their new formula. Our water and sewer pipes are totally worn out. They have holes in them and they are not able to save a reserve to fix those.

I know Yellowknife on the surface looks like it has a lot, but in Yellowknife, every household pays a lot of tax to have the services we have and they are entitled to get the money they need to have the basic services like the roads and water and sewer system in proper working order.

Mr. Speaker, Highway No. 4 is not a road to barbecuing wieners. Highway No. 4, the Ingraham Trail, is one of the busiest areas in the Northwest Territories. I was approached by one of the Aurora Tourism operators reminding me again of how dangerous that road is.

We have thousands and thousands of Japanese tourists coming to visit us and spending dollars in our midst, helping our local shops and restaurants. I would hate to see a disastrous accident on that road.

-- Applause

Mr. Speaker, I think we should really recognize the fact that all of that traffic and activity that is happening on Ingraham Trail is giving this government a lot of money so that it can do the things it needs to do for the communities and our social agenda. I think we have to recognize that for what it is and pay proper attention to that.

Mr. Speaker, another thing is there is such a shortage of lots in Yellowknife. In the Niven Lake area, because the development cost is so expensive, most lots there are going for \$80,000 a lot. By the time they build an average house on them, the house will cost as much as \$300,000. As soon as the house price goes up above \$300,000, CMHC will not insure them unless you put down 25 percent as a down payment. For most people, Mr. Speaker, a \$75,000 down payment is not an option.

I think that it is ridiculous in this day and age, in a city of 20,000 people, that the city has to contemplate providing water and sewer with a bucket and pump service because we do not have the money to put the lift station in there. The government has a responsibility to build the infrastructure so that people can move into and afford the houses with the money they make.

I guess at first take, Mr. Speaker, it may not be so reasonable to think that the City of Yellowknife, as rich as it looks, needs help to get the lots developed. What we need to remember is that every lot that gets built, every house that gets built there, a family of four could bring in as much as \$70,000 or more from the federal government. Given the per capita in Yellowknife, we get about \$7,000 of government money per person, that means \$63,000 of that will go to the communities to help the communities.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, maybe we should look into the \$82 million budget for Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development and by way of promoting economic development, we should use maybe half of that money to just build lots in Yellowknife, because that would then bring us millions of dollars so that we can fund all the services that we need.

Mr. Speaker, I would say as a Yellowknife MLA, if it happens that all the people who need houses to work at our mines or in our secondary industries, if they could move to Hay River or Fort Smith, that is great. I do not think that Yellowknifers are saying they want to be a city of 200,000 people, but we are losing these people to St. Albert and all of Alberta. We are losing our money, and I think the best economic development idea may be to use all of the Northwest Territories Development Corporation small business money, build the lots in Yellowknife, Fort Smith, Hay River and communities, whatever, so we keep our people in the North and we can bring people to the North.

As the realtors in Yellowknife will tell you, we need at least 500 to 600 houses in Yellowknife for the next five years. I do not think we are going to attract these people by saying their sewage will be treated with buckets and their water will be pumped by trucks. I know that a lot of people like that. I mean,

it is part of our feature in Old Town, but I do not think it should be done because that is what is necessary to do.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is about time that Yellowknife gets some attention. I think that having only two Yellowknife Ministers in Cabinet is really showing some suffering, and obviously the Housing Minister has not won his battle in fighting for Yellowknife, which is in such dire need of extra money for the roads, for lots, for water and sewer pipes, for schools.

I wanted to make sure that I put it on the record that this budget really was for the communities. There is not enough there for Yellowknife. I think that the 20,000 people of Yellowknife deserve parity, equality, a fair chance and the recognition that everyone else gets. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. Item 11, replies to the budget address. Item 12, petitions. Item 13, reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 14, tabling of documents. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

ITEM 14: TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

Tabled Document 13-14(5): Procedural and Practical Implications for a Name Change of the Northwest Territories, Background Papers

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document entitled Procedural and Practical Implications for a Name Change of the Northwest Territories, Background Prepared for the Caucus of the 14th Legislative Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. Item 13, tabling of documents. The honourable Member for Nunakput, Mr. Steen.

Tabled Document 14-14(5) Letter From Tuktoyaktuk Mayor Eddie Dillon to Chief Coroner Percy Kinney Requesting an Inquest Into a Fatal Accident in the Beaufort/ Mackenzie Delta

HON. VINCE STEEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table a letter dated February 22, 2002, from the Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk to the chief coroner requesting an inquest into the tragedy that recently occurred in Tuktoyaktuk. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Steen. Item 14, tabling of documents. Item 15, notices of motion. Item 16, notices of motion for first reading of bills. Item 17, motions. The honourable Minister responsible for Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Ootes.

ITEM 17: MOTIONS

Motion 3-14(5): Message to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, Queen of Canada

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories wishes to send a message to Her Majesty, The Queen;

AND WHEREAS the Legislative Assembly wishes to join other Canadians in expressing their congratulations to Her Majesty on the 50th anniversary of her accession;

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Weledeh, that the Legislative Assembly sends the following message to Her Majesty:

To the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty:

Most gracious sovereign Queen of Canada we, the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories of Canada, now in session, wish to extend to Your Majesty on this year marking the celebration marking the 50th anniversary of your accession, our sincere congratulations. The people of the Northwest Territories have been honoured to welcome Your Majesty and other members of the royal family to our land during your reign and have witnessed directly your inspiring example of devotion to duty and unselfish labour on behalf of the welfare of people in Canada and in the other nations of the Commonwealth. We trust that your gracious and peaceful reign may continue for many years and that the Creator will preserve Your Majesty in health and happiness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ootes. We have a motion on the floor. To the motion. Question has been called. All those in favour, please signify. Thank you. All those opposed? Thank you. The motion is carried. Motion 4-14(5), the honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Nitah.

Motion 4-14(5): Appointment of Conflict of Interest Commissioner

MR. NITAH: Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker,

WHEREAS Section 91 of the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act permits the appointment of a Conflict of Interest Commissioner by the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories after the approval of the appointment by resolution of the Legislative Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Legislative Assembly considers the appointment of a Conflict of Interest Commissioner essential to exercise the powers and perform the duties under the act;

AND WHEREAS the office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner is currently being filled under an acting appointment;

AND WHEREAS the Legislative Assembly is of the opinion that the appointment of a Conflict of Interest Commissioner should now be made;

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Weledeh, that pursuant to section 91 of the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, the Legislative Assembly hereby recommends to the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories that Edward N. Hughes, Q.C., be appointed as Conflict of Interest Commissioner. Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nitah. We have a motion on the floor. The motion is in order. To the motion. Question has been called. All those in favour, please signify. I am sorry. I have to back up here. To the motion. Ms. Lee has the floor.

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just want to put on record as to the circumstances surrounding this appointment of the new Conflict of Interest Commissioner. Mr. Speaker, I am in favour of this motion. I have tremendous respect for the new commissioner being appointed, but I just did not think that it would be the right thing for me to have this go unnoticed and un-remarked about what had transpired that had caused the removal of the previous commissioner.

-- Interjection

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say...

MR. SPEAKER: Ms. Lee, I would like to draw your attention to the motion. You may be straying a bit beyond the intent of this motion. Ms. Lee, continue.

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I do believe the motion says whereas there is a vacancy of this position, that there is an acting commissioner here now, and I need to say as a legislator, that we went through a process that had resulted in this motion coming forward. All I want to say for the record and for the people out there is that all the turmoil and the hardship that we had to go through in the way we reviewed the previous commissioner and so on, everything that was in place then is still here. There is no guarantee that in the future, another Conflict of Interest Commissioner would not be subject to the kind of...

MR. SPEAKER: Ms. Lee, I am going to ask you to restrict yourself to the motion. I think you are going a bit beyond this motion.

MS. LEE: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to say one paragraph about taking the time to reflect and remember what we had done to make it necessary for us to appoint a new Conflict of Interest Commissioner today. I believe that is relevant to say that we have to take time to think, that we have no hesitation in appointing a new person to this office, but all the hazards and weaknesses in our system that we had that had resulted in...

MR. SPEAKER: Ms. Lee, would you sit down, please?

-- Interjection

Before we go to the point of order, I have asked the honourable Member to restrict her comments to the motion. How we got to this position is not part of this debate. I will ask the Member not to go there again or I shall have to rule you out of order for the rest of this....the point of order raised by Mr. Bell. Mr. Bell.

Point of Order

MR. BELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just believe that it is improper for us to be somehow alleging that this Assembly ruined the former commissioner's career, especially with this matter before the courts. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bell. This point of order, I was saying the same thing. How we got to this point is not of issue here. It is the will of the House that we are at this juncture and we are now appointing a new Conflict of Interest

Commissioner. Restrict your comments to that point. Ms. Lee, we will try one more time. Ms. Lee.

MS. LEE: Mr. Speaker, may I speak to the point of order, please?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Again, Ms. Lee, the matter that you are speaking to is a matter that is before the court and is of sub judice and is not to go any further in here. The Chair will rule that you are out of order. No further comment from the honourable Member. To the motion. The honourable Member for Range Lake, you have your hand up again. Ms. Lee.

Point of Privilege

MS. LEE: Mr. Speaker, I have a point of privilege.

MR. SPEAKER: What is your point of privilege?

MS. LEE: Mr. Speaker, my point of privilege is being raised at the first instance. My point of privilege is that I have the right, as a Member of this House, to speak to the motion. The motion says there is a vacancy and there is an acting commissioner. It is my privilege to speak. I do not believe that any cases that are going on outside have any bearing on what I have to say about the job before me, which is to agree to the appointment of a new Conflict of Interest Commissioner. I have concerns that have not been resolved in this House, which is...

MR. SPEAKER: Ms. Lee, would you clearly state your point of privilege, please.

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my point of privilege is that the rule allows -- I have a privilege as a Member to speak on behalf of my constituents and as a legislator, on any issues that are before the House. The issue that is before the House is this motion. I want to speak to the motion. I believe I am speaking to the motion. I have been told that I cannot speak to...

MR. SPEAKER: Ms. Lee, I will interrupt you again. The Chair is quite comfortable with the fact that we are not depriving you of your privilege to speak. The Chair is merely asking you to speak to the motion and not the issues that you were leaning towards on what has happened in the past. That is not an issue here. It is a matter that is before the courts and the Chair will not entertain any further comments on that.

If you wish to speak to the appointment as it is listed in here, to this motion, then you may continue. Ms. Lee, to the motion.

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I have made my point and I would like to wish the new Conflict of Interest Commissioner well in his endeavours. I would like to wish the old Conflict of Interest Commissioner well in her career. I would like to thank her for the good things...

MR. SPEAKER: Ms. Lee, I will interrupt you again. Please stick to the motion. If you wish to compliment someone else, please do it at a different time. Thank you. To the motion. Ms. Lee.

MS. LEE: I believe I have concluded my statement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. To the motion. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the motion, I would just like to say how pleased I am that Mr. Ted Hughes has agreed to take this appointment as the Conflict Commissioner for this Legislative Assembly, because of his eminent reputation and experience, and I will be supporting the motion. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. To the motion. Question has been called. All those in favour, please signify. Thank you. All those opposed? Thank you. The motion is carried. Motion 5-14(5). The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Mr. Dent.

Motion 5-14(5): To Amend the Mandate of the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker,

WHEREAS responsibility for examination of the Department of Executive resides with the Standing Committee on Governance and Economic Development;

AND WHEREAS the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight has a broad responsibility for issues which have government-wide implications;

AND WHEREAS that portion of the Department of Executive termed the Executive offices currently includes initiatives such as the Social Agenda, Maximizing Northern Employment and the Energy Secretariat;

AND WHEREAS the cross-departmental, government-wide nature of the Social Agenda, Maximizing Northern Employment, the Energy Secretariat and the executive offices generally is consistent with the mandate of the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight;

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, that the rules for the Legislative Assembly be amended as follows:

- Rule 85(2)(a) is amended by adding "including the executive offices of the Department of the Executive" immediately following "government-wide implications", and
- Rule 85(3) is amended by striking out "including" immediately following "Department of Executive" and substituting "specifically".

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Dent. We have a motion on the floor. To the motion. Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried. Item 17, motions. Item 18, first reading of bills. Item 19, second reading of bills. The honourable Minister responsible for Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

ITEM 19: SECOND READING OF BILLS

Bill 5: An Act to Amend the Adoption Act and the Family Law Act

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Nunakput, that Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Adoption Act and the Family Law Act, be read for the second time.

Mr. Speaker, this bill amends two acts to extend the definition of spouse to include individuals in same-sex relationships. The new definition in the Adoption Act will allow same-sex couples to adopt a child and will allow a same-sex spouse to adopt his or her spouse's child.

The new definition in the Family Law Act will entitle a same-sex spouse to support, division of property and orders respecting the family home under the act.

Finally, a number of provisions are included in this bill to deal with transitional issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. We have a motion on the floor. The motion is in order. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Minister responsible for Health and Social Services, Mr. Miltenberger.

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, human rights legislation across Canada prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees equality under the law to all individuals and various courts across Canada, including the Supreme Court of Canada, have ruled that laws which treat individuals living in same-sex relationships differently from individuals living in opposite-sex common-law relationships can be found to be unconstitutional.

Mr. Speaker, as a result, courts and legislatures have been granting those rights and responsibilities, including the right to spousal support, the right to equal division of property and the right to adopt individuals in same-sex relationships. The current definition of spouse in our Adoption Act and Family Law Act does not ensure those equal rights and responsibilities to individuals in same-sex relationships. In the current legal climate, this means that our legislation is open to a costly court challenge. The principle of equality under the law has guided the courts in their decisions and it is the responsibility of those of us entrusted with making the laws in the Northwest Territories to ensure that those laws conform to our Canadian Constitution. That is the primary purpose of these amendments.

Mr. Speaker, this is a legislative issue before the legislature of the Northwest Territories and it is incumbent upon us to ensure that our laws comply as I have just indicated. I would encourage that we move this bill along to the committee and deal with this as it should be. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, Mr. Roland.

MR. ROLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time I have stood up to speak on an issue such as this. As a Member of the 13th Assembly, I also spoke against making amendments to the Family Law Act. I find it distressing that in fact, this Minister has decided to carry this forward and this government has decided to carry this forward once again. I believe I am speaking for a large number of my constituents who do not believe this is necessary, who in fact believe this is

an act against what they would consider family values and a significant change.

Now, it is one thing to say that as a government, we must follow the laws of Canada in enacting laws in the Northwest Territories. We can find examples of laws that were enacted by governments, and if those governments had opportunity to rescind some of those acts, they would do so. In fact, the damage has been done. We have numerous pieces of legislation that impact on the Northwest Territories in a very negative way when it comes to the people and the values of the people of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister stated in questions about this that he has not contacted any aboriginal organizations, he has not contacted any other municipal governments or the people in the Northwest Territories besides an advertisement in the paper that would say, we are looking at these amendments, send in your comments. In fact, when questioned, he informed this House that this legislation had already been drawn up. Mr. Speaker, it was an empty notion of this government to ask people for their comments when in fact it is already done.

Many will stand up and say it is the laws of Canada and we must follow those laws.

Mr. Speaker, I speak on behalf of people in my constituency who do not believe this law is necessary. There are opportunities for all individuals across the Northwest Territories, regardless of their background and their choice of life and how they would live their lives. There are a few restrictions. The question is, where will this go? Right now, some would say, well, we are leaving the sanctity of marriage still on its own and this will not touch it, but what is next, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, this is an avenue that is distressing to many people, many elders and people who do not believe this is appropriate, but their voice will not be heard because for the greater good of Canada, it is going to be put forward as the way to move.

Mr. Speaker, I speak in the sense of what would be best for families, for individuals and for us as people of the Northwest Territories and the values we hold.

Mr. Speaker, it is not the programs and services that make this land great, as we would call it. It is the people and their values. Sometimes it is good to have different values than those of other people in Canada. Other jurisdictions can change their laws and I would challenge this government to find a law that is the same in every jurisdiction in this one matter. Some laws are very minimal just to meet the requirement that has been set out. In fact, I believe the law that the Government of Canada has made has been made in a way that allows a fair bit of flexibility or interpretation by different jurisdictions.

Some will say that if we do not pass this, that we will be challenged on the Charter, and that much of the dollars that will be expended will be taken from important programs and services. Mr. Speaker, we have been challenged on different issues. There is always a threat in every law that we put in place that it can be challenged. Every law in the Northwest Territories, especially in light of the self-government discussions going on now, where they could say that our laws are interfering with the actions of aboriginal governments.

Mr. Speaker, I am aware that many Members of this Assembly would probably support this, but I have to speak on behalf of many of my constituents that this is not appropriate. It is time to put this away once and for all, and live lives in a sense that, as many of my constituents would say, as God had ordained it.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to be told again how people who choose as I have, for example, to live a life different from that of many others, which includes acknowledging that God is my creator. If I want my children to be taught in this way, I have to have them taught outside the normal functions of this government, because again, that has been declared unconstitutional to have my child taught a specific religion in a public school.

It seems that governments across this land have started to move further and further away from those values that were once held sacred to families and individuals, and have gone to those that can lobby and lobby hard, and know how to access resources and challenge governments through lawyers and whatever else. Mr. Speaker, knowing that is an avenue we face in the Northwest Territories, sometimes it would take legislators to stand up and say no to certain things and take the risk of that challenge.

To be different sometimes, Mr. Speaker, is not such a bad thing. This is not going to take away any rights. It might limit in certain areas what certain individuals in the Northwest Territories would want and consider to be equal to those individuals.

Mr. Speaker, many people can say that the programs and services within the Northwest Territories can be found lacking in the sense of how we have families and how individuals can make that a better situation, but I see this as another avenue of not really dealing with the issue. If somebody says, "Well we have individuals out there who can adopt a child, but they live in a same-sex arrangement. That is better than the family they were born into because that family is considered dysfunctional." Instead of looking at this avenue to fix the problem, why do we not work on the dysfunctional family to ensure that child can be raised in an atmosphere that is a healthy one? Then on top of that, Mr. Speaker, I am sure many would debate what is considered a healthy atmosphere to be raised in.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing that we as a government would be bringing this forward and following other jurisdictions. Simple things that would come out to me, Mr. Speaker, I am sure many of us heard it as we were growing up from family members. When you would do something, they would say, "If your friends are going to play at the edge of the lake or jump off a cliff, are you going to follow?" I can use something as simple as that scenario.

Some would say this is the way to go because everybody else is doing it. Does that make it right just because everybody else is doing it? Is that not an acknowledgement of peer pressure that is being put on in the sense of governing laws and legislation? My family values are too strong, Mr. Speaker, to accept that this government would put forward legislation such as this. I cannot support this, Mr. Speaker, and I cannot vote in favour of this.

I hope that this government, as it goes through this process, will give due process to other individuals in the Northwest Territories to speak and raise their concerns to this Legislative

Assembly. We have done it for the hotel tax. We have done it for the highway fee bill that came forward. In that case, many residents of the Northwest Territories spoke out against such legislation and this government listened. I would urge this government and the Members of this Assembly to give residents a fair opportunity to speak to this. If residents come back and say to this government that this is acceptable and we will do it, then we have our mandate.

I fear, Mr. Speaker, that once again the idea of a constitutional challenge will rule the day and cause this government to move quicker than I think is necessary, especially when it comes to seeing residents of the Northwest Territories have their input.

Mr. Speaker, I will live with the decision of this Assembly, as I believe all Members will, once you put your argument forward and discuss this issue. When it comes to a vote, once the vote is decided, we get on with business. It does not mean that I have to accept for my family and me and for those constituents that I speak for in Inuvik, that this is acceptable and that this government is doing what is considered in the best interests of the residents of the Northwest Territories.

In fact, I can have many of my constituents speak to the matter and say that this is not in the best interests in the long-term vision of people of the Northwest Territories. With that, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting this bill. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Roland. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Mr. Dent.

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this bill is the right thing to do. A number of us supported this kind of change in the 13th Assembly, but we were not successful then. It is time now that this bill passes.

I would also like to address the issue of legality that my colleague brought up. I believe it is our responsibility as legislators to also uphold and respect the laws of Canada. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is the law in Canada, and we are told by the government's legal experts that if we are taken to court on this issue, we will be forced to act. We will have to enact legislation just like this bill. Mr. Speaker, we should respect the law now and should not be forced by the courts to respect the law.

We are being told this by the same legal experts who told this government and this House that if we did not respect the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms when it came to representation by population, the courts would impose a decision on us. Many Members in this House did not listen to that advice and insisted that we go to court and fight it. That did nothing but enrich a few lawyers and cause us in the end to adopt a law that respected the Canadian Charter anyway. I am surprised that my colleague would say that those lawyers who were right then about the same law are wrong now. I respectfully submit that they are right and we would lose if this went to court.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the only responsible course for us is to pass this law. If we choose to fight it, if this government is forced to fight it, again all we are going to be doing is spending money on lawyers instead of on nurses or teachers or other people that work on the front lines to serve our constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I say let us do the right thing and let us spend the money in far more important areas. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Dent. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand here and, as I have remarked on other occasions, to speak in support of this bill. I am pleased to see that the initiative is before us in second reading. The Minister has well addressed, and so has my colleague, Mr. Dent, many of the legal consequences we would find ourselves in if we did not take this responsibility on. I will not dwell on it. I think it has been very clearly established.

Rather, Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about the aspect of right versus wrong, good versus bad, and see just where we are today in terms of our values and the tolerance and the acceptance that we have of a society for ideas and trends that are different, yet are not of a nature that is going to hurt or harm us or pose a threat to any individual, or for that matter to society.

It was not that long ago, not in my living memory, Mr. Speaker, but I think in the memories of elders in the Northwest Territories, when aboriginal people were not allowed to vote or consume alcohol. Further back, women in Canada were not allowed to vote. We have changed. Society changes. It is a good thing now that we are not looking at the gender of a person, at the color of their skin, whether they are black or yellow or red or white. We are not looking at whether they are Jews or Muslims or Christians. We are not looking at whether they are disabled. We are not looking at the languages they speak. Our laws more and more in Canada and around the world are looking at people as individuals, as people, not what unique characteristics they have in the eyes of the law.

Here, Mr. Speaker, is really what is significant to me about this piece of legislation and why it is the responsibility of this Legislature to support this and approve it. Mr. Speaker, when two people of whatever gender come forward and say they want to be recognized in the law as having the will and the commitment to share the responsibility of raising a child, not just getting the right to do that, that looks good on a piece of paper or in a headline or in a procedural book somewhere, but when they want to share in the responsibility of raising a family, that is a significant responsibility. We need that kind of commitment in our territory and our society, Mr. Speaker. As a legislator, I will stand for them to help see that right and responsibility is recognized.

I hope my colleagues can consider their own values and, as I said, their tolerances and their acceptance for what is right and that is, in law, the acceptance of people taking on responsibility and being recognized for that in our laws. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand here in support of this bill.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I will be voting against this bill on the principle that I, for one, believe that religious values, family values and aboriginal values are not being taken into account. You talk about the difference between aboriginal rights, individual rights and collective rights, yet when it comes to aboriginal people in the Northwest

Territories and the rest of Canada, who should have the right to decide in regard to legislations passed through this Legislature and other legislatures in the country, to have a say in how it affects aboriginal people's rights under section 35 of the Canadian Constitution. Section 9124 gives you the right to be able to be treated differently.

What this does is impose on First Nation governments and First Nation organizations in the Northwest Territories, and especially the groups that I represent in the Beaufort-Delta, who are negotiating a self-government agreement, for them to be able to establish programs and services and determine exactly who their membership is and collectively how they will be able to allocate programs and services.

Here again, we missed the opportunity of consultation. We talk about involving First Nations, aboriginal groups in the process of legislation that is being drafted through this House to allow for public involvement in this process, but what we see happening here again is we are being railroaded into bad legislation. When push comes to shove, we will threaten you with court action so you better do something.

I for one can state the Canadian Constitution has been a long time coming for aboriginal people, yet we have section 35. We have a court case that has gone to the Supreme Court of Canada, which recognizes aboriginal and indigenous people's rights to hunt and fish, yet provinces and jurisdictions have that legislation but they do not recognize it. Why is it when it comes to recognizing people's rights and individual rights, that when it comes to aboriginal people, we neglect that basically they have a fundamental, unique role to play in the Canadian dynamics?

What this does is it takes the whole picture of the values of indigenous people, aboriginal obligations we have by way of self-government agreements and also in regard to the sections of the Constitution, which basically protects and ensures that we are able to enhance but not diminish the right of indigenous people to basically continue on with their values.

I for one feel that we, in regard to this case, this bill, have to realize that there are other court challenges in Canada at this time that are presently being put in place or being looked at by lawyers, by religious groups, by family groups and other groups in Canada. For us to basically say we are in the position that we are damned if we do, damned if we do not, and if you do not do anything, you are going to lose in court anyway, I would just as soon lose it in court and allow the justice system to dictate to this government how we are going to do our jobs. They did a good job in regard to the sunset clause and the Friends of Democracy. I think this is the same situation we are in with this case. I have a real problem that this government is not going to allow its membership to speak on this issue.

I would like to know exactly how the Ministers sitting across the House...have a free vote on this matter and also ask the Premier if he would allow his membership to basically speak on this matter in regard to where their values are. Where do you stand as individuals in this House? I think that is the important thing, so that not only ourselves on this side of the House will be speaking on the matter, but yourselves as our elected representative on the Cabinet side should really, honestly tell us exactly where you stand on this issue. By simply sitting on your thumbs and not doing anything basically tells us that, you know...

I think this is such an important issue that we have to have a full consultation process. If it means we go into every community, I suggest we go into every community.

--Applause

For me, this is a matter that is serious and that we have to ensure that we have a real feel for our constituents, the people in our communities and what their values are, not just the values of the people in this House.

I for one, Mr. Speaker, would like to ask that we have a recorded vote on this matter and that the Premier allows his Ministers to speak freely on this issue and vote freely in regard to what their moral beliefs are and what they stand for.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Member for Range Lake, Ms. Lee.

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak in favour of this motion. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate and commend the Minister of Health and Social Services for bringing this legislation onto the floor in the relatively short time period that he has been in that office. I know this has not been easy for him and I know that it has taken strength and courage for him to go against probably some of his closest colleagues to do this. I support the Minister. I really would like to commend him for that.

Mr. Speaker, I know a lot of reasoning here has been that if we do not do this, we are going to be sued, or something like that, so that we are not working of our own volition, but we are being forced to do this.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I am supporting this motion because this is the right thing to do. This is a principled thing to do. Mr. Speaker, I believe that under the Charter and Constitution, there are a lot of sections there that give us rights as a Canadian citizen that we value. One of them is equality, under section 15, which says that we are to be free from discrimination based on any immutable characteristics. We are to be free from any discrimination that is the result of immutable characteristics. Immutable meaning things that we cannot change, such as our race, our skin colour, our hair colour, our eye colour, where we are from and where we were born. Those are things that we cannot change. That is just the way they are and we should be respected for who we are and where we are and we should be entitled to the same rights that the neighbour next door or the person sitting next to me.

Mr. Speaker, also under section 7, I believe, we have the right to life, liberty and security. We have the right to not be scared about who we are, that we are not going to go out the door and that somebody will attack me for my hair colour or my eye colour or who I am as a person.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that every right that we have as a Canadian citizen and a resident of this country that are protected in the law are very fragile. They are there and they have to be protected. They are not to be trampled with because it is not convenient or it does not make sense to us or whatever.

I value my rights and I value my right to be protected under the law. There is also the section in the Charter that allows us to be entitled to equal protection under the law.

I know that as much as every right in that law is important to me, it is important that I make that available and do everything that I can as a legislator to protect that for every citizen in this Territory. It is not because I think I am going to be sued and go to jail. I think it is because the rights are there because we all spoke as citizens, we made our politicians or judges. We have our opinions known about it and these other things that we value. We value equal rights, equality. We value the right to be secure from threats and being treated like we are second-class citizens.

The minute you say that one group of you can do this but another group of you cannot, that is inequality. You have to always make sure that no identifiable group in our society is subject to that sort of discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe the law exists in a vacuum. Law is not just lawyers making up these things. Law is not just a bunch of interest groups lobbying the judges. The law is for all of us there. It is a decision about what is important to us.

Mr. Speaker, I happen to know that in every group that I met, chances are the person sitting next to me, on the left or on the right, are homosexual, gay or lesbian. I think it is dangerous to say that it is them over there. They have different values. It is a lifestyle. It is a religious thing. I happen to know that this is something that is an immutable characteristic. I know that my friends' kids, they have...I do not even want to go there.

All I know is that I am here as a legislator. This is not about values. This is not about religion. This is not about anything but to stand up as a legislator to say that we value the supreme law of this land, that we all have certain rights that we have to protect and that we are entitled to, that people have gone to foreign lands and fought and gave their lives to protect the rights that we have under the Constitution and Charter, that every citizen has the right to be treated equally under the law, that every citizen has the right to be free from threats, or made to feel like they are somehow an isolated group that are not the same as the rest of us. We just will not tolerate that. Anytime there is any sort of inkling of that, I think it is the responsibility of legislators and the like-minded people to speak up and say that is wrong.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, once again, I would like to say that I commend the government and the Minister for bringing this forward, and that I will vote in favour of this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Member for North Slave, Mr. Lafferty.

MR. LAFFERTY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand up to speak against the motion. I understand that sometimes we have to follow the laws of Canada, but then we also have to respect the laws of the aboriginal governments, the people who are negotiating their land claims right now. Canada has for too long dictated to the aboriginal people how they should run their lives. We as 19 Members have no right to tell 20,000 people in the Northwest Territories "This is what you have to do."

Some of my colleagues here that speak for the motion have set out some examples. They are very good examples. One example is we fought in our wars so that we can have rights. Yes, everybody has a right. By 19 of us making a decision on this, where are the rest of the 30,000 people in the Northwest Territories? Why have we not consulted with them? Their rights are not in front of us here. We are only respecting the rights of a few individuals. Nineteen of us have no right to make a decision on their behalf without consulting them.

I am not a lawyer. I do not know the section, but under section 15, I think that is what is called immutability, which is something you cannot change. Yes, that is true, but sexual orientation is something that can be changed. A person can change their sexual orientation or their sexual preference. That can be changed, so it does not fall under that. I would just like to make a point of that.

A good example of rights, the Friends of Democracy came out here saying they are representing 20,000 or 30,000 people. They are right, but are they representing them now when they speak for them because they have not consulted with them? Are we giving them that right? Are we giving the population that we said at one time that we represented, are we giving them that right to speak out on this? No. We have not given them a chance to speak on it. So we cannot go forward today and make a decision for 20,000 people that we say are friends of democracy. Nineteen Members cannot do that.

Then we talk about funds that are going to be spent on court cases. Why is it always the government at fault when it comes to expenditures regarding court cases? Why do the people not look at the people who are taking the government to court and say, "You are the ones who are putting the government to court. You are the ones taking money away from my child when they can have day care." Why does no one go out there and say that to them?

The Friends of Democracy were trying to take this government to court so that Members could not make a stand, could not make a decision at that time without consulting with their people. That is the same thing we are doing here. We are trying to make a decision without consulting with the people.

When it comes to same-sex child adoption, I have a problem with that. In the Child Welfare Act, we say the best interests of the child. Is this the best interests of the child that we are taking in? We are going to be exposing them to a different way of life, a different way of growing up. Is this the best interest of the child when they have to go to school and be ridiculed or be harassed or teased at the schoolyard because of who their parents are? Is this the best interest of the child? No, it is not the best interest of the child. A child has no choice who their parents can be. A child does not have a choice, but under the Child Welfare Act, it says the best interests of the child. Are we going to change that in that act?

Well, if we are going to change things, let us change everything. Let us look at that act one more time. Is it going to be for the best interests of the child?

I do not have anything wrong with same-sex benefits because they are adults. They have a choice. They make that choice. Their sexual preference is their own. I respect that, but you cannot put a child through that. For the best interest of the child, I must vote against this. Thank you.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Nitah.

MR. NITAH: Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in the Northwest Territories, First Nations communities could introduce by-laws through their band council resolution to prevent people from consuming alcohol in their communities. Alcohol is a substance that the federal and territorial governments generate a lot of revenues from. It should be a human rights issue.

The point I am trying to make, Mr. Speaker, is aboriginal people are recognized in the Constitution of Canada through the Indian Act as a collective, not as individuals. This issue is under individual rights protected in the Charter and in the Constitution of Canada. In that sense, if we do pass this law, we may be infringing on the constitutional rights of aboriginal people and their wishes.

Mr. Speaker, I am a young man. I would like to think I am a fairly liberal thinker. I have not made my decision on this one, but it is a monumental decision that has to be made. It borders moral obligations and morality. The religious freedoms and religious beliefs are touched on here. The welfare of children is in question. You could even go as far as saying with artificial insemination and all of that stuff that is coming into a bill such as this, you could ask the question, what is the role of men in the future on this?

I would like the government to take this bill to the public. I would like them to take it to my constituency so they can tell the committee what they think. Based on what they think and what they tell them, I will make my decision. Those are some of the concerns I have and some of the issues that surround this bill. I look forward to seeing the consultation process and agenda developed by the government, so that the appropriate standing committee can take it to the public. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nitah. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Member for Yellowknife South, Mr. Bell.

MR. BELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand here today in support of this bill. For me, I guess it is pretty cut and dry, Mr. Speaker. As Mr. Dent and Mr. Braden have indicated, clearly we can change our legislation or we can go to court, spend a couple hundred thousand dollars and be forced to change our legislation by the courts. I personally would rather see us spend the money on the programs and services, Mr. Speaker.

I have heard some comments here today made by my colleagues. I think we have to be practical in what we are talking about here. This may seem funny, but I do not think if we ignore same-sex couples or we decide we are going to discriminate against them, they are all of a sudden going to throw their hands up and say "You know, this is just too much work and too much effort. Forget it, we are going to go on to heterosexual relationships." I do not believe that kind of thing happens, Mr. Speaker. I think it would be silly to think that would be the case.

We talk about the best interests of the child. The fact remains this child lives with parents who are of the same sex. If there is ridicule and teasing on the playground, that exists whether or not we allow both of them to legally adopt or one to legally adopt.

There certainly are concerns for those parents and that child when only one is the legal guardian. For instance, if the child goes for medical attention and it is something that needs permission of the legal guardian, if the one legal guardian is not available, there could possibly be delays. The child may have a hard time travelling outside of our country's borders and may not be able to do so without their legal guardian in tow.

Well, there has been a lot of discussion about morality here today, Mr. Speaker, and I really do not think that is where we need to focus our attention on. I think we need to focus our attention on the legality of what we are doing here today. I am interested to see what kind of things the public has to suggest when we have our public hearing and I look forward to that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bell. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quite a few of the points that I would have made have already been made by my colleagues, but I just wanted to be on the record today to stand and say that I cannot support this bill. I could not even support it if I went back to my constituency and every single one of them told me they wanted me to support it, because for me, this begins to encroach on something which is my own personal belief and my own personal commitment.

I mean, we do a lot of things in politics in terms of representing the interests of our constituents, but there are sometimes things which arise which we -- it is just a line we cannot go over. It is a line we cannot cross because of our own personal convictions.

I want to say that I do not hold any ill will towards the people who make choices different than mine, but I am held to a standard for what I believe in. If I do not respect that, if I do not stand for that, I do not stand for anything. This is probably more of a personal issue to me.

In this Territory, we stand to pray in this Legislature. We pray in our committee meetings. We pray to the Creator. I believe that the relationship that holds life between a man and a woman, that creates life, is a mystery. It is a beautiful thing. I think that as legislators, to enact laws that would contradict that shows disrespect to the Creator. Life continues on the basis of the way things were created. I believe it is a beautiful thing. I cannot personally be involved in an action I perceive to make a mockery of that or to show disrespect for that.

I cannot support the bill. Like I said, people make choices based on their own view of the world and how they see things. I want to emphasize that I do not hold these people in ill regard. I do not doubt that they love their children. I do not doubt that they are good caregivers. I recognize people make different choices in life, but this is a personal issue for me. I cannot support this bill. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Member for Deh Cho, Mr. McLeod.

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a very difficult issue to discuss. It surprisingly is an issue where a

question was asked of me immediately after getting elected. A constituent came up to me and asked me my position on it, same-sex couples. I realized then that it was not something I knew a whole lot about, so I have spent a lot of time listening and trying to develop an opinion on this issue. It has been on the table. It has been in our committees for quite some time now. I have heard arguments for and against. I have heard even today, as the Minister presented the bill, he spoke of statutes and laws and constitutional rights that were violated.

We also heard some of my colleagues here say that if we do not pass this, we will be challenged in court. We also heard other arguments that this bill is not necessary. It is against religious beliefs. We hear a lot being spoke here today about rights.

What really bothers me is that we have a number of aboriginal governments out there. We have said many times that we will operate government to government to government. Yet on this issue, an issue that affects everybody in the North, there is no consultation. What does that say about the people of the Beaufort-Delta who have worked hard for self-government? To the Dogrib Nation? To the Sahtu? I cannot believe we are proceeding to this point without a process for them to get involved.

The Deh Cho is now in the negotiating process. They are working hard to be recognized as a primary government, yet we do not have the courtesy to extend an invitation to them. I am appalled that this Minister did not go to any of the communities in the North to discuss this.

To pass this bill, to support any bill, in my opinion, without proper consultation with aboriginal governments, without the aboriginal government's involvement is a slap in the face to them. Putting an ad in the newspaper is not adequate consultation. I have said it before in terms of resource development in community projects and I will say it again. It is not acceptable to me.

I realize that should this bill go forward and get the majority of the votes here today, it will go to committee and there will be a hearing. That hearing will be here in Yellowknife and not in any of my communities and not in any other aboriginal communities of the North, that is for sure.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about rights, yet my colleagues on the other side of this room, I do not believe they will have a free vote. I do not believe they will be able to stand up to speak their true feelings on this issue, feelings that their constituents are expecting them to defend.

I have to request that the Premier allow his Cabinet to have a free vote on this. I would also like to request that this vote be recorded.

Mr. Speaker, I am not against this bill totally in principle, but rather on process. I will not support this bill as it stands. Thank you.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Member for Nunakput, Mr. Steen.

HON. VINCE STEEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my name is already on as the seconder of the bill, so it is not a

question of whether I support it or not. I would like to speak to the principle of the bill. The principle of the bill is not whether somebody has the right to adopt. The principle of the bill is whether they have equal rights. There used to be a question of whether I as an aboriginal had an equal right as a non-aboriginal. It is not a question anymore. The Charter of Rights says we all have...

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Steen, may I just interrupt for a moment and ask a member of the audience not to lean on the glass? Thank you.

HON. VINCE STEEN: Mr. Speaker, there is a question from some Members as to whether we did proper consultation as a government. I wonder whether this is the type of bill that you would really consider taking to aboriginal groups for consideration before second reading, because it is something that is almost compelled to us by the Charter of Rights. We really have no option but to put this forward, as some Members have said.

However, we should keep in mind that as aboriginals, we do have people representing us. I am not the speaker for the Inuvialuit. I have people who speak for my group. They will have the opportunity through the consultation process that is to follow through the standing committee to make their views known as to whether the Inuvialuit really support this concept of adoption by same-sex couples.

I know that in my land claims, there is a clause there that says this government cannot make a law of this nature without consultation with us. So I expect that there is going to be consultation. I also know that in the existing Adoption Act, there are requirements that people who are involved in the authorities of adoption take into consideration the ethnic origin of the child when adoption is being requested or being put forward.

I presume that my groups will make it known whether or not they think that aboriginals such as us should be adopted by same-sex couples, or our children from us. I assume my aboriginal group will put their position known on this. I do know that in the legislation that governs adoption, like the Member for North Slave says, the best interest of the child is taken into consideration. If the best interest of the child is to be taken into consideration, I would hope that this type of legislation would state whether or not the ethnic origin of the child would have to be taken into consideration when same-sex couple adoption is being considered. I think that type of legislation would allow for this thing to proceed without interfering with anybody's rights under the Charter.

I am not a lawyer, the same as my colleague from North Slave said, but on the other hand, I believe there are ways to compromise around this and still allow people their rights under the Charter. I am not being forced by anyone to support this thing. I think people have to realize we live in Canada and we have a law that we have to abide by. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Steen. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Ootes.

HON. JAKE OOTES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the issue of property rights for same-sex couples was an issue

during the 13th Legislative Assembly and it was discussed at that time at length, and there was a great deal of opposition. There was a motion in this House to support that move and it was defeated at that time, Mr. Speaker.

Today we have heard a lot of references to the Charter of Rights and legal opinions, and I think it comes down to a question of what is the right thing and what is the wrong thing to do? It is my belief that we have a responsibility here to address this issue, to make some decisions and to move forward. I feel we should act now and it is incumbent upon us to move this along. It is cut and dry to me. When it occurred in the 13th Legislative Assembly strictly with the property rights issue, I remember that was very contentious. Yet I do not believe that is very contentious today anymore.

Mr. Speaker, I think we have all come to realize that was the right thing to do, even despite the fact it was defeated in this House. I am certainly in support of moving this along and in support of this bill, and I will be voting in favour of it. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ootes. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Premier, Mr. Kakfwi.

HON. STEPHEN KAKFWI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, my comments will be brief. I believe that as a government and as legislators, it is our duty to reviews the bills that we have and the laws, and if they are found lacking or to be discriminatory by the laws of this country, then it is our duty to address that. This is what I believe the issue is today. I do not believe I feel I am being forced to do anything against my will. I truly believe discrimination in any form has to be addressed and should not be in any laws in any legislature in this country. That would apply equally to public governments, to municipal governments, to aboriginal governments, as to federal, provincial and territorial.

This is our work. The lawmakers of this country have made rulings and we are obliged to accept that and to have it reflected in the legislation that we have. This is what we are doing. This is not something that should be subject to what is popular and what the current mood of the public is. This is about the rights of people and the right to be treated fairly and equally. That is what the issue is, and therefore, we have discussed it as Ministers and we have agreed that we will vote fully in support of this legislation. Thank you.

-- Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. To the principle of the bill. There are no other Members. The mover has the right to have the last comment on it, Mr. Miltenberger, if you choose.

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I as well will be very brief. In this House and in this Legislature where we represent the people is where we have to make choices that are sometimes very difficult. Sometimes they cause us much soul-searching, but the reality is, as the Premier indicated, that the law of the land, that legislative landscape, is clear that we have an obligation as legislators to make sure that our laws are not found wanting and that our laws do not discriminate and do not detract from the quality of people.

I thank all my colleagues for their comments. I know the importance of this issue to all people, but I would ask that we consider moving this bill forward, that we approve second reading and then into committee, and allow this House to make

sure that our laws in fact are no longer found wanting in this area. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. There is no further debate on the principle of the bill. The Chair recognizes the honourable Member for Mackenzie-Delta.

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at this time I would like to request a recorded vote on this.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. A request for a recorded vote has been made. Is the House ready for the vote? Question has been called. All those in favour, please rise. Mr. Clerk.

CLERK OF THE ASSEMBLY (Mr. Hamilton): Mr. Miltenberger, Mr. Antoine, Mr. Kakfwi, Mr. Handley, Mr. Allen, Mr. Ootes, Ms. Lee, Mr. Dent, Mr. Bell, Mr. Braden, Mr. Steen.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. All those opposed, please rise.

CLERK OF THE ASSEMBLY (Mr. Hamilton): Mr. Krutko, Mr. Lafferty, Mr. Roland, Mrs. Groenewegen, Mr. McLeod, Mr. Nitah.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. All those abstaining, please rise. Thank you. The vote is concluded. The results of the vote; in favour of the motion, 11; opposed, six; with zero abstentions. The motion is carried.

-- Applause

Therefore, Bill 5 has had second reading. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to a committee. Item 19, second reading of bills. The honourable Minister of Finance, Mr. Handley.

Bill 6: An Act to Amend the Financial Administration Act

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Mr. Speaker,

I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes, that Bill 6, An Act to Amend the Financial Administration Act, be read for the second time.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would amend the Financial Administration Act to clarify the authority of the Government of the Northwest Territories to indemnify members of the public service. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Minister. We have a motion. The motion is in order. To the principle of the bill. Question has been called. Is the House ready for the vote? All those in favour, please signify. Thank you. All those opposed? Thank you. The motion is carried. Bill 6 has had second reading. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to a committee.

Item 20, consideration in committee of the whole of bills and other matters; Bill 2, Bill 4, Committee Report 1-14(5), Committee Report 2-14(5), Committee Report 3-14(5), Motion 1-14(5), with Mr. Krutko in the chair.

ITEM 20: CONSIDERATION IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE OF BILLS AND OTHER MATTERS

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): I would like to call the committee of the whole to order. We are dealing with several items: Bill 2, Bill 4, Committee Report 1-4(15), Committee Report 2-14(5), Committee Report 3-14(5) and Motion 1-14(5). What is the wish of the committee? Mr. Dent.

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to recommend that we continue consideration of Bill 2 and Committee Reports 1-14(5), 2-14(5), 3-14(5) concurrently, specifically to try and conclude the consideration of the budget of RWED, followed by Transportation.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): At this time, I would like to ask the Minister responsible for Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development if he will be bringing in any witnesses?

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Sergeant-at-Arms, can you escort the witnesses in please?

We will just take a short break.

-- Break

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Minister, could you please introduce your witnesses for the record?

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Mr. Chairman, I have with me Mr. Bob McLeod, deputy minister of RWED to my left, and to my far right is Fred Koe, president of the Northwest Territories Development Corporation. To my immediate right is Mr. Jim Kennedy, director of corporate services. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Thank you, Mr. Minister. Welcome witnesses. We were on page 11-17, resource management and economic development, budget summary, operations expense, total operations expense, \$35,597,000. Mr. Dent.

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A question about the mandate of the Northwest Territories Development Corporation. I take it from the purpose of the corporation as shown on page 11-16 that it was established to create employment and income for Northerners.

I guess I would ask if the prime purpose for this agency is one of a social purpose, almost an income support function. What relationship does it have to other agencies like Education, Culture and Employment that provide income support programs? Is there any integration here?

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Minister.

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Mr. Chairman, I will refer the question to the president of the Development Corporation, Fred Koe.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Koe.

MR. KOE: Mahsi. The corporation is a Crown agency set up under its own legislation. We obtain and work with companies and businesses throughout the North by investing funds that are allocated to the corporation through this budget. We try to piggy-back and get resources, joint resources from the partners that are involved in the business. In some cases, they are a band, a development corporation or a private entrepreneur. We

also look at other sources of funding from other government agencies, be they federal or territorial.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Thank you, Mr. Koe. Mr. Dent.

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess I am trying to establish, I know Mr. Koe talked about funding also coming from other partners and so on, but I am looking for more about coordination of this government's social goals. What sort of ties does the Development Corporation have to the social goals as articulated by this government, either through Education, Culture and Employment and their Income Support Program, or through the Executive with the Maximizing Northern Employment Program?

This government has a number of social goals that are tied to employment. If this is an agency that provides or that follows up on that area as well, I am just trying to find out how they coordinate with the government in order to ensure that all of the money that we are spending in this area is best coordinated. You know, so Education, Culture and Employment is not going somewhere with some of their initiatives with job creation, but Maximizing Northern Employment, perhaps through one of the other government departments, is not trying to do the same thing, and the Development Corporation does something similar. We find out after the fact that we have three different agencies working in the same region and they were not all aware of what was going on.

I just want to make sure that we have some coordination so that we do not see some area getting all of the benefits and perhaps some other areas of the Territories not getting some benefit because the players were not talking to each other.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Thank you, Mr. Dent. The president of the NWT Development Corporation, Mr. Koe.

MR. KOE: Mahsi. Most of our funding is through an application process. We either set up a subsidiary business, which is wholly or partially owned by the corporation, or we set up a venture company. So most of our investments are through a company, a business, so the coordination with other government departments is through that one business.

We do not do workshops or training programs as such, other than if they are channeled through a specific business. We could be doing some generic programs. There was one in the Beaufort-Delta with Aurora College on the career program. That was run by the Aurora College. It was not run by the Development Corporation. They used our facilities. That was the tie-in, so there is coordination in the sense that we do look for sources of money that we can access so that we can train people that are working in our businesses.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Dent.

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would now like to follow up on questions that Ms. Lee was asking yesterday. They have to do with the BCC loans and the issue of market disruption. Can the Minister tell me, what is the maximum amount of a loan that can be accessed by an entrepreneur through the BCC in a level three community?

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Minister.

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Thank you. We just recently, as the deputy minister indicated yesterday, upped the amount to \$2

million dollars. It was \$250,000 and the board had authorization to go to \$500,000. Just recently, we have upped the amount. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Dent.

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess my concern has partly to do with the magnitude of the increase and the magnitude of the monies that can now be available.

Since the Business Credit Corporation takes on loans that are more risky, I would assume they also have a history of having to write off more loans than would a chartered bank.

My concern is that we are going to be in a situation here where if somebody were to access a significant amount of money like that to start an operation, a commercial operation in, let's say Yellowknife, that is in competition with another, that \$2 million dollars could mean an awful lot of damage could be done in the market place, perhaps putting both companies out of business before that \$2 million dollars was gone.

I really have a problem with this issue of the BCC not taking any market disruption into account and saying that because we charge 2 percent over what the banks are charging, the market takes care of itself. Based on an analyst's assessment of whether or not a business might make it, I think I have a grave concern about what sort of damage could be done within the market place.

I would ask the Minister if we could re-examine the issue of market disruption when it comes to loans, particularly loans of the larger magnitude. You are then talking about setting up a business that would have the capability, in my opinion, of significantly impacting even an established business in town.

You have \$2 million dollars that you can access to start a large corporation. You obviously have some money of your own that is going in. You are talking about setting up a fairly large company at this point that could in fact put other large companies at risk.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Minister.

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, through the board's structure, the board, whenever a loan of a large magnitude -- well, any loan that mattered goes to the board. They closely scrutinize it. They operate like a bank. Therefore, they scrutinize the application very closely. It goes through the board's process and any large loans goes to the Minister's office for me to approve it.

We can put mechanisms in place to review these different large loans. In response to your pre-amble, I would like to turn it over to the deputy minister to reply to those.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The deputy minister, Mr. McLeod.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. When we brought forward a legislative proposal to change the legislation to increase the size of loan to a maximum of \$2 million dollars, at that time, we presented information as to the percentage of losses. When the cap was a million dollars, the BCC board loans ranked fairly well in comparison to other jurisdictions, when compared to Saskatchewan and others. I think it was in the neighborhood of 14 percent, in that range. We were very

good compared to other lending agencies that were in the same area.

With regard to the market disruption, the BCC board faces a lot of importance when they are evaluating proposals and applications for loans. They put a lot of emphasis on the ability to repay the loan. If there is no capacity to repay, their tendency has been not to recommend it for approval.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Thank you, Mr. Minister. Next on my list I have Mr. Bell. Mr. Bell.

MR. BELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have several questions in this area on economic development. The first question I would like to ask is if the Minister could give me a bit of a comparison of two programs, those being Community Futures and the Business Development Fund. I have a hard time in going through the main estimates here differentiating between the two. I am wondering if you could do that for me. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The deputy minister, Mr. McLeod.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Community Futures fund is a fund that was devolved from the federal government. Our government expanded it to cover all regions. It is primarily a loan program. With the success of the Community Futures, they have been able to take on additional programs and deliver it on behalf of either the federal government or ourselves. Primarily, we provide O and M funding to the Community Futures. In most cases, we have provided capital funding so they can use it to make loans. They make loans up to a maximum of \$75,000. For those Community Futures that are not capitalized, we have made arrangements so that they can lend money from the Business Credit Corporation loan fund.

Business development funds are money, grants and contributions that are made available to businesses. Generally, they are made by our regional trade and investment people. Each region has been allocated approximately \$300,000 in grants and contributions. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Bell.

MR. BELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I heard the deputy minister correctly, each region gets \$300,000 to -- I guess these would be grants, not necessarily loans, but every region gets \$300,000, regardless of the population or the number of applicants?

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The deputy minister, Mr. Bob McLeod.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: That is correct. It is based on the draw. In some cases, not all regions utilize the whole \$300,000, so we generally move the money around to where the demand is the greatest. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Bell.

MR. BELL: I do not know how it works in other regions or what the uptake is like, but I have had constituents comment to me that they tried to get in on BDF funding but that the money was largely spoken for, essentially April 1st or maybe even earlier. There would be a line-up of projects competing for this small amount of money. First of all, I guess I should ask the deputy if that is true in the North Slave region, I guess we would be, and

if this has been something that has been ongoing for a number of years.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The deputy minister.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: Mr. Chairman, the Member is correct. It has been a problem in the past but we took steps this year to deal with it. What we did is we instituted a policy change so that the -- generally, the rule of thumb that we use is we limit the size of the contributions to a maximum of \$25,000 so we do not have that problem anymore. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Bell.

MR. BELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So now with the new limit of \$25,000 if, for instance, in this fiscal year we run up against that \$300,000 ceiling quickly, will we look in future years at raising the amount of money in the pot?

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The deputy minister.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: Yes, we would hope that would be the case, but we have not had the problem this year where we have been fully expended on any region. There might be one region where we are close to utilizing the full amount of the regional allocation. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Bell.

MR. BELL: Thank you. One other question in the area of market disruption, and these stem from the questions asked by Mr. Dent, it makes a lot of sense for me that when we are in the business of doling out grants to corporations, we would certainly look at market disruption. I know we look at level one, two and three communities and we do make distinctions between them, but I am wondering in the area of loans. This is the first I had really thought of it. It seemed very natural or normal to me that we would not consider market disruption when we are talking about loans and we do charge a higher rate of interest. Does the Minister have experience with other provincial lending agencies that would be characterized as lenders of last resort, as to whether or not they consider market disruption?

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The deputy minister, Mr. McLeod.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: My understanding is in most jurisdictions, they let the private sector take care of itself, because they have to borrow the money. Generally, if you have to borrow the money, it is a free market system, so that is generally the way they operate. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Bell.

MR. BELL: Thank you. So if I heard the deputy correctly, then by not considering market disruption for our loans, we are not doing anything that seems out of the norm, or out of normal practice, I guess, for other jurisdictions?

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The deputy minister.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: That is my understanding, but as I said earlier, we do take into account the ability to repay a loan. If a project or a proposal is not viable or feasible, then we will not lend the money. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Bell.

MR. BELL: Yes, I would certainly think that would be the case, and I thank the deputy minister for that answer. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Thank you, Mr. Bell. Next on the list I have Mr. Dent.

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I obviously take a different point of view than Mr. Bell, because I think if we are going to write off 14 percent of these loans, that is not letting the market look after itself. If we are letting the market look after itself, we would make everybody compete on a level playing field and let them go to a bank.

If we are going to interfere in the market and give a leg up to some businesses, then I think it is important that we make sure that market disruption is taken into account.

I guess one of the reasons I am particularly concerned about that is the small size of our business community in the North. I think the government has to be very careful about any interference there. I will leave that and move on to another area.

I am interested in finding out, as the Minister will know, what is happening with the Wildlife Act review?

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Minister.

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the department has completed the second round of public consultation. The department has met with the wildlife aboriginal advisory group to finalize its recommendation on the legislation. A report of the recommendation from this WAAG group has been provided to my office. We in RWED have analyzed the results of public consultation and the department is preparing a policy position on the major issues. We will be preparing an information document for public distribution this summer.

It would be outlining the results of the consultation that we have undertaken with the hunters and the wildlife groups, and a proposal on the major issues for a new Wildlife Act and species at risk will be in this proposal.

We should be ready. We are on-stream. We think that the earlier information that we provided, we are still aiming for a new wildlife legislation to come into force during the fall of 2003, so we have a number of steps we have to go through in that whole process. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Dent.

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the Minister said they are hoping to have the Wildlife Act, the new legislation, come into force in the fall of 2003. I am guessing that because of the timing and when we might expect the next election, and the last session that this Legislature will probably sit will be at the latest June, 2003, is the Minister saying that the act will then have to be passed by the 15th Assembly?

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The Minister responsible for Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development, Mr. Antoine.

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Maybe I should just backtrack there and say that for this summer and fall, we would like to have legislation drafted. We estimate about eight to 10 months for the drafting because we have just finished the consultation. We

are aiming for the summer and fall to have legislation drafted, and by November 2002, we hope to have draft legislation to Cabinet for approval to proceed. Following that, the draft legislation to go to the Legislative Assembly in November, next fall, and then, of course, the standing committee would review the draft legislation. By next winter/spring 2003, we would like to deal with the legislation through a legislative process. By late spring, we are aiming for the legislation to be concluded in the House. That way, by the fall of 2003, the act will come into force. That is our timing on it right now. We think we are still on target. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Dent.

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to ask some questions on page 11-16 regarding the description of what diamond projects does. It says in here that diamond projects develops programs to address access to diamonds. What specifically do we mean by programs to address access to diamonds?

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The deputy minister, Mr. Bob McLeod.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What we mean there, for example, the Member is familiar with BHP, where the government dealt with the company to provide rough diamonds for local manufacturing. Essentially, we are continuing to facilitate that. We are looking at entering into negotiations with Diavik and De Beers to ensure that occurs. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Dent.

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The negotiations with the diamond companies, are we looking to achieve the same sort of levels with new diamond mines as we have with BHP? Perhaps at the same time could I find out -- I had asked the Premier but never got an answer -- what percentage of the rough diamonds is BHP making available to northern manufacturers right now?

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The deputy minister.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do not want to pre-empt the Premier's response, but it is 10 percent of the value of the diamonds produced. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Dent.

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Further on in that description of the work of the diamond projects, there is note that one of their activities is development of a program to address regulation of the new industry. What are we talking about here when we talk about regulation?

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The deputy minister.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: Mr. Chairman, as the Member is probably aware, we have spent a lot of time and resources in developing a diamond certification program, and the issue of conflict diamonds has become a worldwide phenomena and has certainly added a premium and a value to Northwest Territories diamonds. In order for us to maintain that premium, we have to be sure that the diamonds that are produced, polished and manufactured in the Northwest Territories are not only conflict-free but also meet all of the standards that we think should be in place in the secondary industry in the Northwest Territories.

Our government is proposing a Diamond Manufacturers Act, which will regulate the manufacturing side of the business. That is what we are looking at. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Dent.

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I understand the need for the government to ensure that we do not have conflict diamonds coming through our facilities here, so we can prove to the world that the diamonds we have are not blood diamonds or conflict diamonds. I guess I am having trouble understanding why we would be concerned about the standards. There are already international standards for diamonds. A jewelry appraiser can look at a diamond and say that a diamond is a VS1 E-colour, or F-colour or G-colour, with a good cut or a bad cut. Why are we worried about what the standards are? Manufacturers have to compete in the world market. Surely all we should be worried about is demonstrating that we do not have conflict diamonds here.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The deputy minister.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of reasons and there are other factors that come into play with regard to any product -- when you look at some of the conditions in Africa with regard to the diamond industry. We also feel that there is some value in maintaining the standards of manufacturing. Unless we can satisfy ourselves in that regard, then there is no quality assurance. It is our feeling that through a Diamond Manufacturers Act, we can have some control over manufacturing and the type of manufacturers that set up business up here. We have heard quite a bit from the RCMP about some of the security concerns with regard to diamonds. Those are the reasons it is being proposed. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Dent.

MR. DENT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I remain unconvinced that quality assurance is something a government needs to be involved in. I think that is taken care of in the market place quite easily. I would hope we would be spending our money on far more important things, like proper monitoring systems and being able to prove our diamonds are clean, rather than working at that.

I am also concerned about the next part of that phrase, which says we are developing programs to address the need for an efficient polished distribution system. Good heavens, that is what diamond wholesalers do. They distribute diamonds. Why are we trying to set up our own? That is what it sounds like we are trying to do here. Why would we want to have anything to do with the distribution system? Hopefully we are not going to try to compete with De Beers or any of the other giants that are out already distributing polished diamonds. Why are we even talking about it?

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The deputy minister. Mr. Bob McLeod.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The reason for doing that, as you know, the multi-national diamond companies were very reluctant to set up a secondary industry. We have been pushing very hard to have a secondary industry in the Northwest Territories and to have value added and a premium associated with Northwest Territories' diamonds. In order for us

to do that, we have been pushing very hard on the brand names and on the trademark for diamonds.

In order for us to maintain a premium, we have to make sure that diamonds are available here in the Northwest Territories and that they can be efficiently marketed. I think initially, the feeling was that if you left the marketing to the large diamond companies, we would probably be left out in left field. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Excuse me, Mr. Dent, I have three other Members on the list. If you want, I will put you at the bottom of the list. Next I have Ms. Lee, Mr. Braden and Mr. Lafferty. Ms. Lee.

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I have a question on the funding for the NWT Business Credit Corporation and the NWT Development Corporation. This is a similar question to the one that was asked by Mr. Dent. I just became aware only recently that market disruption is not even an important criteria in considering government loans. I can understand that these are people or businesses that have been rejected by mainstream banks and that they are charged interest rates that are higher because of that risk and so on, but that still does not make it right, I do not think, to have someone come with a proposal for a business venture in a community, especially a community like Yellowknife, where there is a free market. If someone was to come in and say they want to open a restaurant and they cannot get money from a bank and they need \$100,000, for the government to give that -- I do not know how that comes into stimulating economic development and employment in the North.

How does that create new jobs? All that would do is replace an existing market, especially when the existing businesses have built up their own equity. They have mortgaged their own houses or whatever to raise their money, and then for somebody to come in and come up with an idea for a business that is already in existence, and they get their leg up through taxpayers' money. They get money from the government so that you open a business and undercut the businesses that are already in existence. How does that create new jobs and new opportunities?

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Lafferty): Thank you. Deputy minister McLeod.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess the approach taken is that competition is the hallmark of a free market economy. These businesses that apply for loans pay a higher rate than what the banks offer. Generally, the expectation is that whether you are successful or not will be based on the service you provide and the quality of product you sell. That is the basis.

If the desire is there to prevent any loans to any other than existing businesses, then the BCC is governed by an act from this Legislative Assembly and that could be changed, or else it could be done through policy change. The approach up until now has been that competition is in the best interests of the consumer. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): President of the NWT Development Corporation, Mr. Koe.

MR. KOE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Northwest Territories Development Corporation has their own investment guidelines and one of the criteria in these guidelines has to take into consideration market disruption. We have also not been in the business of giving out loans, except for one refinancing project that was a multi-group of financiers that considered a project. To safeguard our assets, we had to change our equity position to a loan position. There was already a business that was in existence for a considerable number of years. Mahsi.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Ms. Lee.

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Going by the answer that Mr. Koe just provided, I am really then speaking mainly about the work of the Business Credit Corporation, and that is fine. I would just like the Minister to pay attention to -- I am not saying that he is not, but let us think about this. We do not have enough money to do everything we need to do. We are always saying that. There is not enough money to go around, especially for small communities. I just travelled to communities through the special committee. When we were in Tsiigehtchic, for example, other than the co-op store, there was no place to go for coffee. There is a coffee shop there but it is not really open because it is not really viable to run that business.

We were also in Aklavik. We went there much earlier than the meeting time because we wanted to spend some time there, and the big-town Yellowknife girl that I am, I learned that there is no place to go in Aklavik for coffee or food. It is a good thing we had hosts who were able to provide us with food, so we had something to eat before we had a 7:30 meeting.

I would like to see \$100,000 or \$200,000 of BCC money being spent on giving some business people in Tsiigehtchic or Aklavik or some other communities where there are no local businesses like that and create jobs. If it is never going to be a money-making enterprise and no private person wants to get into that, it could be a government operation where you give ongoing \$100,000 a year or something so that Tsiigehtchic will have a coffee shop where they could offer some kind of a simple menu or something.

Compare that with Yellowknife. Does Yellowknife need someone to open a restaurant to serve pizza? There is a lot of competition for pizza and Chinese food, or whatever restaurant you want in Yellowknife. It could be another coffee shop or whatever.

What is the point of this program? I think if you look at it, it says to stimulate economic development and employment. Why do you not do that for communities that do not have it, not in market communities where there is competition already?

You can say that free competition is good, but as long as everyone is on an equal playing field. If some people get government money to run their business, you go out of business and you forfeit on a loan, that is fine because it is the government that is taking the risk. I was talking to Mr. Dent. Somebody could borrow \$2 million and set up a radio station. I am just trying to give a real life example, and you say that they are borrowing at a higher cost and they have to make a go of it, but if you spend \$2 million to run somebody out of business and they cannot pay back, sorry...well, we are not doing any good.

I am really surprised that we do not care about market disruption. Free competition is good, but if you are injecting taxpayers' money and put another person who had their own sweat equity and their own investment in line and put them out of business, the government is not doing its job. That is not the government's job.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Minister.

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the purpose of this Business Credit Corporation loan is not to put existing businesses out of business. That is not the intention. The intention is to help and stimulate our economy, create jobs and help the businesses. The example that Ms. Lee made about Tsiigehtchic and Aklavik, we all understand that. There are many communities in the North that are in a similar position, but the Business Credit Corporation is like a bank, so you need a business to apply for a loan. The Business Credit Corporation does not give out grants. That is the responsibility of our department, our trade and investment people through the business loan fund.

As for the Business Credit Corporation, the board takes applications and they scrutinize all the loans and make a decision based on the criteria that they have. The purpose of this -- this has been in existence for a number of years. We are very conscious of the fact that there is a concern about market disruption. Like the deputy says, this is an act of this House and perhaps we should look at it if it is a concern. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Braden.

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to follow through on a line of questioning that Mr. Dent had on the department's interest in the regulation to the emerging diamond industry. I have read the proposed framework for regulation, which was tabled in the House last year. It strikes me as something that is a bit at odds with what a government would want to do in terms of regulating a trade. It seems government does have a purpose and obligation where there are trades involving public safety or standards of this nature, boiler inspections or gas fittings, there are definitely standards that we want.

When it comes to private sector entrepreneurial areas, that does not seem to be an area where government goes. I do not think we tend to tell arts and crafts people what kind of standards they need to make a fur parka or a carving, or a painting by. Those things are genuinely regulated by the market.

I guess I wanted to challenge the department on its perceived need to come in and create standards in our emerging area when around the world, and in the diamond marketing business to begin with, there is over a hundred years of history in this already. What is it that requires the Northwest Territories to, if you will, go against the grain? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Minister.

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, this regulation of this new diamond industry is something that was put on the table about a year ago as a discussion paper. The idea is to throw the idea out to see what kind of feedback is out there from people in the industry and genuinely people in the North. The response has been from people who are directly involved with the industry.

We would like to continue to get the response from it. Then we will have to take a close look at it on how to proceed from there. It is good to get feedback at this time but there is a process out there that we would like to continue.

Through this process as a department, we will have to further develop the response that we get from this discussion paper and perhaps see what will go to Cabinet for review. We are still at the early stages of that. I welcome the comments here today. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Braden.

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Another aspect of the emerging industry here -- and I am sure it is fascinating to watch, not only from our point of view as a government who wants to get as much as we can from this resource. What is emerging too, perhaps it is coincidental, but around the world as the giant corporations such as De Beers change their entire profile and strategy in terms of marketing and branding diamonds, we are caught up in that as well. We are not only trying to learn about the industry and how it has operated, but we are also involved in the finance of the changes.

I wanted to ask specifically of the polar bear and its significance to the branding and the marketing of the Canadian Arctic Diamonds. We already have a certification program, which is generally well established and well accepted. It does carry a perception of value, of integrity, that these diamonds are ethically and appropriately produced.

However, there are a lot of different ideas in the diamond industry now about just how good or what kind of value these symbols add. What can the department advise of our stance right now on the significance of branding, specifically to the polar bear? Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Minister.

HON. JIM ANTOINE: Thank you. We are involved in a new industry here that is value-added to the diamond industry over the last three years. We have three manufacturing companies that we have helped get off the ground here. They are making their way through this industry. They are learning and we are also learning as a government about the whole diamond industry.

What we know today is that because of the debate over the conflict diamonds, or the blood diamonds, in the world where diamonds are acquired from a country in conflict to finance their war and so forth, the fact that we could track diamonds from our diamond mines through the polishing and cutting and certifying it to be pure, natural, authentic arctic diamonds, northern diamonds, I think is the future.

We are told by diamond dealers in the States and in southern Canada that is going to be the future. We have access to a very high quality of industry here so we have to do it right. We want to do it right.

The polar bear has always been the symbol for the Northwest Territories for over 30 years and the relationship between our symbols as the Government of the Northwest Territories being the polar bear is significant to the marketing aspect of it. There is a very high premium related to the fact that we have pure natural diamonds that could be traceable and certified. If we

could use our symbols to help the manufacturers market it, we are in support of that. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Braden.

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Would the use then of the polar bear brand be something that we should then make mandatory for any product that comes out of the Northwest Territories as being mined and cut here, a mandatory requirement?

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The deputy minister, Mr. Bob McLeod.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That is certainly an approach we wanted to take. As you may be aware, we have our certification program, which features the polar bear prominently. Two out of the three manufacturers in Yellowknife are participating. It is very important, this certification, because we do not want to get into the situation where diamonds that were mined outside the Northwest Territories have polar bears on them. We know that has been happening. For that reason, the trademark issue is very important because of the high premium that is involved with diamonds. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Braden.

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Is this something that is of such high importance -- and I do support the idea, the value of having a well-controlled system, in terms of being able to say without question that a certain product was indeed mined and cut in Canada -- but if it is that important, should we not be making it mandatory then for anyone who wants to process a diamond in Canada, they must participate in that certification program. Should we not be doing that? Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): The deputy minister.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It certainly would be nice if we could do that, but right now, it is a voluntary program and we do not have any tools at our disposal to force anybody to do anything. You talked about the Diamond Manufacturers Act, which is one way where we are looking at getting some control over the industry. Right now, it is all voluntary. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Dent has called a point of order. Mr. Dent.

Point of Order

MR. DENT: Mr. Chairman, I would like to raise a point of order. I believe Ms. Lee inappropriately referred to another Member, being myself, and their private business interests in this House. I am concerned that the implication may be that I am speaking about a program of this government because it may be used to compete with that business with which I am involved. I am concerned about the implication that there is motive for a position I have taken here.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Thank you, Mr. Dent. I will allow for debate on your point of order. To the point of order. Ms. Lee.

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to say that I was just trying to make a point about this program, and I meant in no way to imply that the Member was trying to benefit in any

way or anything like that at all, so if there was any misunderstanding taken, I apologize. It was never meant to be that way. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Mr. Dent, is that satisfactory? The Member has apologized to you. Do you accept the apology?

MR. DENT: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): Thank you, Mr. Dent. With the time being 7:30, I will rise and report progress. I would like to thank the Minister and the witnesses. Sergeant-at-Arms, would you please escort the witnesses out?

MR. SPEAKER: The House will come back to order. Order, please. There are things to do and the Chair would like to get them done. Item 21, report of committee of the whole. The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

ITEM 21: REPORT OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Bill 2 and would like to report progress. Mr. Speaker, I move the report of the committee of the whole be concurred with.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Do we have a seconder for the motion? The honourable Member for Nahendeh seconds the motion. The motion is in order. All those in favour? Thank you. All those opposed? Thank you. The motion is carried. Item 22, third reading of bills. Item 23, orders of the day. Mr. Clerk.

ITEM 23: ORDERS OF THE DAY

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Hamilton): Mr. Speaker, there will be a meeting of the Special Committee on Self-Government and the Sunset Clause immediately at adjournment this evening and at 9:00 a.m. of the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight.

Orders of the day for Friday, March 1, 2002:

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Oral Questions
7. Written Questions
8. Returns to Written Questions
9. Replies to Opening Address
10. Petitions
11. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
12. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
13. Tabling of Documents

14. Notices of Motion
15. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
16. Motions
17. First Reading of Bills
 - Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Legislative Assembly Retiring Allowances Act and the Supplementary Retiring Allowances Act
 - Bill 8, An Act to Amend the Nursing Profession Act and the Pharmacy Act
18. Second Reading of Bills
19. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Bill 2, Appropriation Act, 2002-2003
 - Bill 4, An Act to Amend the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act
 - Committee Report 1-14(5), Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight Report on the Review of the 2002-2003 Main Estimates
 - Committee Report 2-14(5), Standing Committee on Governance and Economic Development Report on the Review of the 2002-2003 Main Estimates
 - Committee Report 3-14(5), Standing Committee on Social Programs Report on the Review of the 2002-2003 Main Estimates
 - Motion 1-14(5), Establishment of a Special Committee on Rural Community Affairs
20. Report of Committee of the Whole
21. Third Reading of Bills
22. Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until Friday, March 1, 2002, at 10:00 a.m.

-- ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

