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The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Members of the Legislative Assembly

Speaker

Hon. Shane Thompson
(Nahendeh)

Hon. Caitlin Cleveland

(Kam Lake)
*Minister of Education, Culture and
Employment*
*Minister of Industry, Tourism and
Investment*

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(Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh)

Mr. Robert Hawkins

(Yellowknife Centre)

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(Nunakput)
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Box 1320

Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

Tel: (867) 767-9010 Fax: (867) 920-4735 Toll-Free: 1-800-661-0784

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Tuesday, February 20, 2024****Members Present**

Hon. Caitlin Cleveland, Mr. Edjericon, Mr. Hawkins, Hon. Lucy Kuptana, Hon. Jay MacDonald, Mr. McNeely, Ms. Morgan, Mr. Morse, Mr. Nerysoo, Ms. Reid, Mr. Rodgers, Hon. Lesa Semmler, Hon. R.J. Simpson, Mr. Testart, Mr. Thompson, Hon. Caroline Wawzonek, Mrs. Weyallon Armstrong, Mrs. Yakeleya

The House met at 1:32 p.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Shane Thompson): Before we get started, I'd like to recognize one of my favorite little guys, Finnigan Gosselin who I got to have supper with -- no, it was lunch, at McDonald's, him and his sister. So welcome to the Assembly.

Good afternoon. Members, welcome to the House. Although we did not sit last week, our work continues as we set a path forward for the 20th Assembly. Last week, Members worked together to set the priorities of the 20th Legislative Assembly. They will be tabled in this House later today. As we work to find common ground, it was clear we are all here to make this territory a better place for future generations. I would like to thank the staff and facilitator for supporting us in this process.

Colleagues, it is no secret the importance of youth, the role our young people play in the territories. We need to work for their benefit and their future. As leaders, we need to listen and learn from them. An opportunity to hear what youth think is the Legislative Assembly's Annual Youth Parliament. Youth Parliament brings grade 9 and 10 students from all 19 ridings to the Legislative Assembly in Yellowknife. They experience firsthand the roles of an MLA and learn about consensus government.

This year, I will chair the Youth Parliament. I am excited to hear directly from the young people as they debate the issues that are important to them. Over the years, we have had youth bring forward important topics of interest to them and their ridings. It will be exciting to be in the Chamber to hear their perspectives. The application deadline for the Youth Parliament is March 1st, 2024, and more information and the application can be found on the Legislative Assembly website.

Members, I am encouraging you to reach out to schools in your riding and invite all our youth in grades 9 and 10 to apply for this opportunity.

Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Infrastructure.

Ministers' Statements**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 9-20(1):
2030 ENERGY STRATEGY UPDATE**

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, secure, affordable, and sustainable - that is the vision for energy in the Northwest Territories outlined in the 2030 Energy Strategy, a vision for an energy system that is less dependent on fossil fuels and that contributes to the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the Northwest Territories and its residents.

Since the energy strategy was released in 2018, the Government of the Northwest Territories and the entire territory have made positive strides in realizing that vision. The progress made on the energy strategy is detailed in the 2022-2023 Energy Initiatives Report, which was released today by the GNWT as part of its annual reporting for the three strategies guiding action on climate change and the territory's energy future.

Territory-wide, residents, businesses and governments are answering this call to action. Thanks to our collective efforts, we have been able to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent compared to 2005 levels and we are on track to meet the target of reducing emissions by 30 percent below 2005 levels by 2030.

Mr. Speaker, these collective efforts can be seen through the Arctic Energy Alliance's work with communities, Indigenous governments, and Indigenous organizations to develop energy solutions locally by starting community energy planning processes in Fort Simpson, Ulukhaktok, and Kakisa. They can be seen as the GNWT works with the Government of Canada and Northland Utilities to start renewable energy feasibility studies for Wekweeti and Samba K'e. These studies are

laying the groundwork to advance community-led renewable energy projects; projects that will not only stabilize energy costs and reduce emissions but also provide economic benefits. There has also been investment in making our energy infrastructure more modern and efficient throughout the Northwest Territories.

In 2023, the Inuvik Wind Project was completed and is now providing renewable power to the Inuvik grid. It is expected to deliver at least approximately 30 percent of the electricity Inuvik needs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 6,000 tonnes per year. In Lutselk'e, the Northwest Territories Power Corporation is replacing the community's existing diesel power plant with a new, more efficient power plant that will reduce emissions by approximately 100 tonnes annually and more easily accommodate the addition of renewable energy technologies to the local grid. The diesel power plant in Sachs Harbour is also in the process of being replaced by a modern, energy efficient power plant.

As the territory looks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, the GNWT and its partners are exploring ways to increase the adoption of electric vehicles in the territory. One of the barriers we face is a lack of charging infrastructure in the territory.

In 2023, the GNWT and Government of Canada each invested \$1.9 million for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation and Northland Utilities to install electric vehicle fast chargers in Behchoko, Fort Providence, Enterprise, Hay River, Buffalo Junction, Fort Smith, and Yellowknife. These stations are all expected to be operating by December 2024, creating the first zero-emissions charging corridor in the Northwest Territories. The energy strategy is also about looking to the future and how we can best achieve making energy in the Northwest Territories secure, affordable, and sustainable.

Transformational projects are an important part of that future, and I look forward to continuing discussions on advancing the Fort Providence-Kakisa transmission line and the Taltson hydro expansion. As the pathways to a lower carbon future and secure, affordable and sustainable energy in the NWT evolve, so must the strategy that guides our approach. To be adaptive to emerging technologies, new opportunities and feedback, the Departments of Infrastructure and Environment and Climate Change undertook a joint review of the Energy Strategy and Climate Change Strategic Framework in 2023.

With the input from Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, the public,

stakeholders and our partners, we have an exciting opportunity to shape the future of our energy landscape. A What We Heard report from our engagement with these parties will be published in March 2024.

Mr. Speaker, our future energy and climate plans need to be ambitious, effective and reasonable. Looking ahead, I am confident we can achieve the vision of the energy strategy with governments, residents and businesses working together. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Infrastructure. Ministers' statements. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 10-20(1): CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

HON. JAY MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, climate change is one of the biggest challenges that we face as a territory. The NWT is experiencing rapid warming at up to four times the global rate which affects every aspect of our lives and impacts our territory's economic, environmental, social, and cultural health. Today, the Department of Environment and Climate Change released the Responding to Climate Change in the NWT Annual Report. I am pleased to report that the Government of the Northwest Territories and partners across the territory are making real progress on this front.

Mr. Speaker, all 132 action items under the NWT Climate Change Action Plan are either ongoing or completed, and partnership is crucial to our success. As highlighted in the annual report, we are working with partners to secure funding for the development of fuel breaks in 29 communities as well as the construction of 60 climate-resilient homes in 19 communities equipped with fire-resistant materials and foundations resistant to permafrost thaw.

The GNWT is working with partners and the NWT Climate Change Council to develop a suite of interactive courses and training modules for workers to build climate adaptation skills within the NWT workforce. We are also exploring a pilot program to implement a risk-based approach to community planning in up to five NWT communities. We are partnering with the NWT Geological Survey, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, and NWT communities to advance hazard mapping and surficial mapping for communities. This mapping of permafrost sensitivity will help communities plan for adaptation to permafrost thaw.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT continues to invest significant resources to address climate change and implement the actions identified in our climate change and energy action plans. To access the funding, we need to mitigate emissions and adapt infrastructure. We continue to engage with the federal government on multiple federal climate change initiatives, such as the National Adaptation Strategy the Emissions Reduction Plan, Canada's Climate Change Science and Knowledge Plan, carbon pricing and critical minerals.

Work is well underway to inform a renewed five-year NWT Climate Change Action Plan. The Departments of Environment and Climate Change and Infrastructure are co-developing a What We Heard report from the July 2023 workshop on the NWT's approach to energy and climate change and emissions targets. We have also worked with partners over the last two years to develop a territorial risks and opportunities assessment to inform our climate change adaptation priorities. Both of these processes will inform the renewed five-year action plan which will be ready for review and engagement with the public, Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations in the summer of 2024.

Mr. Speaker, addressing climate change is not going to happen overnight, and we cannot do it alone. The GNWT remains committed to working with partners to address the serious impacts that climate change is having on NWT communities and ecosystems and on the health and safety of residents. By partnering on climate action with Indigenous and community governments, co-management boards, academia, non-governmental organizations, and the Government of Canada, we are delivering on a shared vision of a healthy and resilient NWT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Ministers' statements. Minister for Health and Social Services.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 11-20(1):
SHARED HEALTH PRIORITIES
AGREEMENT WITH FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, last week we announced two significant bilateral agreements with the Government of Canada. These agreements secured two federal investments totaling \$36.38 million and demonstrate a shared commitment to both improving health care services for NWT residents, generally, and to enhancing the supports for NWT seniors and elders to stay at

home longer as they age with dignity, close to their loved ones and community.

Of that total investment, \$24.18 million will be provided over three years, under the Working Together to Improve Health Care for Canadians Agreement, to help strengthen our health care system. This funding will be instrumental in supporting new and ongoing initiatives to address medium- and long-term human resource needs outlined in the Northwest Territories health and social services system human resource plan, which was released in June 2022.

Current initiatives include the family medicine residency program, system-wide training and compliance tracking, cultural safety and anti-racism training, and employee engagement for retention. We will also use this funding to formally establish a territorial public health unit which will focus in collaboration with the integrated primary care teams to enhance operational oversight, increase regional public health capacity, and improve equitable access to services. By strengthening the public health capacity, we can minimize service duplication, improve health outcomes, and provide effective and timely client care that will reduce hospital admissions and improve outcomes for NWT residents.

Mr. Speaker, we will also establish a territorial addictions medicine team which will help improve the coordination and delivery of shared addictions care. Over the next three years, clinical staff specializing in addictions will be added to our system. The program will formally establish an inpatient medical detox programming, community-based withdrawal management, and comprehensive outpatient withdrawal management capacity supported by telehealth and virtual care services. This funding also supports suicide prevention and life promotion initiatives via the community suicide prevention fund. A new position will be created to assist Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations in accessing both the community suicide prevention fund and the community wellness and addictions recovery fund. These funds empower recipients to implement culturally-grounded suicide prevention, mental wellness, and addiction recovery programs tailored to community and regional needs.

Under the Aging with Dignity Agreement, we have also secured \$12.2 million in federal investment over five years, which will support our work to improve access for residents to home and community care services and enable workforce improvements for long-term care and ensure safety and improved quality of life for long-term care residents. The funding will

advance the implementation and support of the ongoing operational needs of the international resident assessment instrument, which plays an important role in facilitating effective client assessments, ensuring services are meeting individual needs, and enabling continuous monitoring of health status.

Mr. Speaker, with this investment from Canada, we are also aiming to address workforce needs, striving to ensure that all our long-term care facilities can deliver 3.6 hours of direct care per resident per day. It will support updated facility equipment and furnishings, streamline infection prevention and control policies and processes, and provide training for housekeeping staff. These measures aim to ensure consistency across our system and enhance overall safety for residents.

Mr. Speaker, our NWT health and social service system is committed to ensuring complete transparency and accountability. Annual public reports will detail progress on these initiatives, keeping Members, residents, and stakeholders well-informed about advancements and outcomes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Ministers' statements. Premier.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 12-20(1):
MINISTER ABSENT FROM THE HOUSE

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise Members that the Honourable Vince McKay will be absent from the House today and tomorrow to attend meetings of the federal, provincial, territorial Ministers responsible for emergency management in Ottawa. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Premier. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member, Great Slave.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 64-20(1):
MAINTENANCE OF RENTAL UNITS

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, since the election period last fall, I have heard multiple concerns from constituents in my riding with respect to the upkeep of rental units. The recent Northern Housing Report 2023 released by CMHC provides an analysis on market housing in Yellowknife. Rental rates have gone up and 28 percent of families in the city are unable to afford secure, affordable, rental housing.

Mr. Speaker, 18.2 percent of renters in Yellowknife are in core housing need. This

means that they are living in units that are unaffordable, unsuitable, or inadequate. I have seen firsthand and heard from residents that there are many issues with some rental buildings here in the capital. Buildings are not being adequately repaired or renovated and, in some cases, have pest and mold problems and, sadly, far too often residents feel unsafe and insecure. Tenants do not feel like they can hold landlords to higher standards without repercussions and that the process to hold landlords to higher maintenance and repair standards is too difficult and onerous on tenants.

Mr. Speaker, Northview owns the majority of rental space in Yellowknife. Northview grew into a real estate investment trust called Northern Property REIT in 2002 and eventually into Northview Apartment REIT in 2015. Mr. Speaker, Northview Apartment REIT is a publicly-traded company. REITs control a large part of the rental housing market across the country, and this is here in Yellowknife as well. REITs put profits for their shareholders ahead of housing affordability and repair. The monopoly of so-called affordable rental stock has resulted in rent increases during a time where cost of living issues are dire and challenging for much of my riding. It's also contributed to reduced building maintenance service resulting in units with substandard repair and maintenance.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize that the GNWT is limited in what they can do to improve maintenance and repair standards in rental units but there may be better supports that could be in place for tenants. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Minister of Justice at the appropriate time. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Great Slave. Members' statements. Member from Frame Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 65-20(1):
REDUCTIONS TO NURSING AID
POSITIONS

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, over the past five years, nursing aides have been indispensable members of nursing teams in the NWT, particularly shining during the pandemic as unsung heroes alongside nurses. Their expanded roles during the pandemic included providing crucial support and companionship to isolated, critically ill elders, going above and beyond to ensure no one passed away alone by offering comfort and conveying messages of love from family members. Their presence not only facilitated medical care but also preserved the dignity of patients in their final moments.

Beyond the pandemic, nursing aides have played vital roles in various hospital operations, including during last summer's evacuations when they assisted with evacuating patients and with their safe repatriation from across western Canada when we were allowed to return.

Nursing aides help provide safe and ethical care amid constant gridlocks within the hospital system, alleviate a significant portion of the workload on an already exhausted nursing workforce, and contribute to reducing patient admission times. Their assistance with feeding, mobilization, and personal care directly prevents pressure injuries and hospital acquired infections thereby keeping hospital-acquired complications and extended admissions at a minimum. Furthermore, nursing aides play a crucial role in mitigating workplace violence in creating a safer environment for all health care staff. Despite facing challenges, they have shown unwavering commitment to upholding patient care standards.

The news confirmed last week that the end of COVID-related federal funding could lead to staff cuts at Stanton by the end of March, including these crucial nursing aide positions. Nursing aides play an important role in the quality of care offered to Northerners, Mr. Speaker. Re-enforcing these positions is crucial to maintaining and improving a high standard of care. Eliminating these positions could not only deteriorate care standards but also demoralize our health care workers who, in the face of growing pressures, continue to selflessly serve Northerners. When we are actively working to recruit and notably retain nurses, Mr. Speaker, I am of the opinion that taking steps which could negatively impact their working environment does not align with our priorities. I will have questions for the Minister at the appropriate time. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 66-20(1):
TERRITORIAL REGIONAL WELLNESS
COUNCILS

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, territorial and regional wellness councils, a new mandate to address today's changing society.

Mr. Speaker, the transition from territorial and regional health boards to territorial and regional wellness council happened August 2016. It created a new vision. However, society has changed dramatically.

The drugs and genocide of our communities and families has become a crisis throughout the Northwest Territories. Speaking only closer to home, it is a huge concern. Mr. Speaker, a quote from the August 2016 department press release: These changes have been made to help break down the systemic barriers to efficient and effective care and service delivery and build a foundation of a system with improved accountability and performance.

Mr. Speaker, a prudent approach to administrative systems is routinely review of programs and services through the lens of efficiency, departmental review, and modernize to our changing society.

Mr. Speaker, the joint Indigenous and residents' conceptual approach to delivering high quality health care is, in theory, the right thing to do. The authorities of the territorial and regional wellness councils are and can be said is limited - limited to an advisory role capacity only.

Mr. Speaker, empowering our communities and deliver of high-quality health care is our fiduciary obligation and responsibilities and, more importantly, expanding both councils with more control is crucial in meeting the changing society. Later, Mr. Speaker, I will have questions to the Minister of Health and Social Services. Mahsi.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 67-20(1):
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES MONTH

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Translation unavailable].

Mr. Speaker, in the NWT, February is the Indigenous Languages Month which was first celebrated in the NWT in 1993 as one designated day; however, the NWT's first Language Commissioner recommended, based on feedback from NWT residents, that the territory devote more than just one day to celebrate the importance of languages within our society. Since then, the NWT remains the only jurisdiction in the country with an entire month celebrating the Indigenous languages. The NWT is also the only jurisdiction that has 11 official languages.

Mr. Speaker, while these are positive facts to be proud of, there are aspects within our government regarding the availability of services in the Indigenous languages that are lacking and need to be improved. For example, there are numerous anecdotal stories of

Indigenous people seeking medical care from Stanton Hospital, or other health centres, where they encountered language barriers and therefore cannot receive the proper treatment they need. I have heard from staff and patients alike that interpreter services are not always readily available when needed.

Mr. Speaker, there are still many elders who do not speak English fluently, if at all, and they need support in getting their needs met within all our government services. This is also a problem for some residents who leave their home communities due to medical travel, especially when they are sent to Edmonton where it's even harder to obtain interpreter services for medical appointments.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, on the topic of Indigenous languages there are many medical terminologies along with legal words regarding the law and with some political and economic terms that still need to be translated within the nine official languages in the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, constituents have asked me whether our government will receive the accredited interpreter training program for Indigenous languages that used to be offered at Aurora College in the '90s. I am seeking unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

That program though, to the dismay of many Indigenous people, was cut 28 years ago and nothing like it has ever replaced it.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, keeping Indigenous languages alive and healthy in the North is very important, and we must act to help revitalize and protect them before it's too late. I will have questions for the Minister of ECE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Deh Cho. Members' statements. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 68-20(1):
RESTORING BALANCE PLAN

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week, the GNWT announced their restorative balance plan which aims at tackling our mounting debt. This plan sets out a deficit reduction target of \$150 million a year and \$600 million over the four-year period. With little economic development on the horizon, it is obvious that the government income will be low, remain flat. Therefore, these targets will have to be met primarily through budget cuts, but it's too early to get a clear picture of where those cuts will be and how they will be implemented. That's austerity and is not a priority for the

GNWT 20th Assembly and does not come as a surprise. We are \$1.6 billion in the hole and climbing and it should have stopped long ago yet, yes, it's true that the many of the circumstances that had inflated our deficits were beyond our control. However, the GNWT also missed a lot of obvious warning signs and critical opportunities to prevent us from getting into the mess we have today.

We know when our mines -- we are going to start -- oh, sorry, the mines are going to start closing but we never focus on pivoting towards a new development. Instead, we just keep on expanding the size of government. In the last five years alone, the size of the GNWT workforce grew by 25 percent, well outpacing our population growth; a significant portion of those government jobs being in senior management positions. In addition, the GNWT also struggled to keep major projects on time within their budget. Our unsustainable finances are due to top heavy administration, a structure that struggles to reign in the costs.

Now to turn to our finances, we must come up with a plan that could be hundreds of millions of dollars to cut in a few short years. The GNWT also is committed to more equitable responsive relationship with Indigenous governments. Unilaterally clawing back investments across the North is a direct conflict with any kind of honest nation-to-nation relationship. This is the same old colonial mantra of dictatorship and indifference with no place in our territory and future.

The communities I represent already have underfunded as it has been waiting too long for assistance they need. Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh receives a small, less than half a percent of the overall 2 percent budget. It may be time to do more with less but our approach to our deficit that cuts what little my communities receive denies -- Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous.

---Unanimous consent granted

It may be time to do more with less but our approach to our deficit that cuts with what little my communities receive denies our priorities without addressing the root causes of our deficit is not -- is no real solution. We'll just end up in the same fiscal situation ten years from now except my people will have more and more houses to repair, more infrastructures to build in restoring the balanced plan. I hope to see more meaningful words in the balance. I have questions for the Finance Minister at the appropriate time. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 69-20(1):
CABIN LEASES IN THE INUVIALUIT
SETTLEMENT REGION

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On August 23rd, 2023, the department announced changes to land lease pricing, and on October 4th, 2023, the Minister of Lands announced in the House that the Minister recognize land lease fees were challenging for many residents. Mr. Speaker, land lease rents were raised in 2018 up to \$840.

A three-tiered system for all recreational leases was proposed to ensure those with limited and seasonal access will pay less than those with year-round access. Mr. Speaker, the new Public Lands Act, which has received assent but waiting for regulations to be implemented to come into force, will integrate these differences.

Mr. Speaker, for Indigenous people with a recreational lease within an area of asserted or established rights that have lease rent arrears prior to August 2023, Mr. Speaker, may be eligible for pausing of collection and/or forgiveness of lease rent arrears.

In the 19th Assembly, Mr. Speaker, there was discussion, particularly raised from the Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes, regarding the Department of Lands' effort to address unauthorized occupants. Concerns were raised in the House regarding the department's approach to this matter and, specifically, the rights of Indigenous people. Mr. Speaker, this led to Motion 77-19(2), Review of Land Lease Policy and Procedures, in the House calling on the Government of the Northwest Territories to forgive and pause the collection of current and new lease payments for all Indigenous cabin leaseholders.

The government responded, Mr. Speaker. Since January 2023, GNWT has been working with Indigenous governments under the NWT intergovernmental agreement on lands and resources. The GNWT is conducting a legal review to determine whether collection of fees and taxes imposed on Indigenous rights. Effective immediately the government will pause collections, actions, and on any outstanding arrears for lease fees from Indigenous recreational leaseholders.

Mr. Speaker, given this government's desire to work with our Indigenous partners and ensure we have the trust and respect to do so, Mr. Speaker, I call on this government to axe the lease payment requirements on Indigenous peoples that have harvested and lived in these regions long before this government existed.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 70-20(1):
CONSENSUS GOVERNMENT AND POLICY
CREATION

MR. HAWKINS: A hallmark of consensus government, Mr. Speaker, is Members work with the Cabinet and the Cabinet works with the Members on this side of the House, at times to discuss policy changes. We're working together to find solutions together. You know, sometimes we even talk about issues in advance of them becoming public policies. But that's not to say Members have a veto, Mr. Speaker. No, my goodness. Members' input matters a lot. Sometimes maybe even we put it to the point is it is fundamental to how consensus government is built around here. It defines the difference on how we do business here versus how they do business down south, Mr. Speaker. They do business in isolation. They come up with policies and they implement them and the opposition, sometimes seen as Regular Members, have to live with it.

Mr. Speaker, has the honeymoon of the 20th Assembly come to an end? With successive governments I've seen, even in their minority of context, they get a little bit hubris over time, drunk with their authority and power. Are we swiftly moving in that direction?

On February 6th on CBC, my goodness, Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister publicly announced that the carbon tax policy was changing by her swift pen. Mr. Speaker, there was no consultation with Members. There was no discussion in committee. This is all too dark of an experience for many of us because it will be the standard. I wish it was only that case.

Now, this isn't about the merits of the carbon tax. This is strictly the merits of consensus government put to the test. Well, if it only ended there. Remember, this is a Minister who's never served on the regular benches. They do not understand being kept in the dark when Cabinet releases their policy.

But on February 8th, Members received an e-mail to say that Cabinet has come up with a new fiscal strategy, and this is how we're going to cut and change and do business differently. Then they call a press release to host it on the following Monday. Mr. Speaker, where is the discussion with committee Members? Have committee Members become an inconvenience to the government? We're certainly there when they reach out to share responsibility in the context of things going bad, but we are never invited to the table when things are going good.

Mr. Speaker, to quote Premier Simpson on November 27th, he talks about it takes a lot of difficult work but it's important work to be working together, Mr. Speaker. That's a loose quote. But the point is, is that has this esoteric club given up on Regular Members? I hope that hasn't been the case. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 71-20(1):
RESTORING BALANCE PLAN AND
EXPECTATIONS

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, expectations for the 20th Assembly are high. After long years of successive and unprecedented crises, Northerners are ready to turn the page on the past and step boldly into the future. Yes, expectations are high, Mr. Speaker, and crucial to these aspirations is the question any government must ask itself: How the heck are we going to pay for them?

Mr. Speaker, last week, my honourable friend mentioned this, just moments ago, the romantically titled Restoring Balance of Fiscal Sustainability Strategy for the 20th Legislative Assembly was released publicly committing to finding \$150 million in new revenues or cost savings by 2028, by the end of this term, through this next upcoming budget and ongoing budgets as well. There are other measures in that, but what it amounts to is a severe contraction of government spending in favour of managing deficits and debt. Of course, Mr. Speaker, it's incumbent on us as responsible stewards to ensure our fiscal house is in order but not at the expense of our own ambition.

Mr. Speaker, I can't help but question the timing of the release of this strategy ahead of this Assembly setting its own priorities let alone not even discussing those priorities, which we did last week, a week after the strategy was put in place. Is this a dampening of expectations? Is it lowering the bar, so the public comes to understand that maybe you need to slow your roll; you're not going to be able to get everything you want?

I think we should meet these challenges because we can meet these challenges with ambition and optimism, Mr. Speaker. We started this Assembly on an optimistic tone, and I don't think that optimistic tone has left us. But we've already lowered expectations, and that needs to be restored. We need to get back to the place where Northerners are looking to us to lead us into the future, to solve the challenges they put us here to solve, and to do that responsibly but not at the expense of

delivering real results for Northerners. Surely, we're capable of meeting these challenges through prudent budgeting emphasizing value for money. And let us not forget, Mr. Speaker, we are here to serve the public and the enterprise of governments must ensure that their needs are met first and the government's debt is serviced next. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 72-20(1):
TSIIGEHTCHIC ACCESS TO HEALTH AND
JUSTICE SERVICES

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Members' statements. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the community of Tsiigehtchic and its residents have been requesting the services of the health department and the justice department for a few decades without any success.

Mr. Speaker, the closest nurse and RCMP is about 60 kilometres away. That is about 45 minutes' drive by vehicle. This is dependent on the season. In the winter, you can go directly by the all-weather road. In the summer, you would have to use the ferry system, which can add time on the travel and time is essential. It depends on the severity of the health concern. And the RCMP is required in the community to deal with the influx of the drug activity.

Mr. Speaker, I've been told personal stories from concerned residents who have had their neighbours die in their arms. This is because the community does not have anyone certified to attend to these isolated emergencies. The community of Tsiigehtchic and its residents deserve these services of the health and justice department. We also state that the safety of our residents throughout -- we always state that the safety of our residents throughout the NWT is crucial. And at the end of the day, it is very important to this government. Let's show the people of Tsiigehtchic and other small communities that do not have these essential services that we do care and start providing these services to them.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to see this government engage with our federal counterparts and the Indigenous governments to start the process of providing these services to our residents so our residents can feel safe within their own communities. Mr. Speaker, this is just another example of taking control of our Indigenous communities and fall short of providing essential necessary services to protect the residents of Tsiigehtchic. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have questions for the Premier at a later time.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Mackenzie Delta. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife North.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 73-20(1):
 ,, STAFFING THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to talk about health care which is clearly a priority for Members here although perhaps we have different areas of top concern.

It's our largest operating budget. And to be clear, a lot is at stake here. Much more than money. It's a matter of preserving lives and taking care of people when they're suffering the most and providing a sense of security for our families, as Mr. Nerysoo was just describing. But it should alarm us that NTHSSA has been bleeding money since it was established with an accumulated deficit of at least \$200 million.

Now, I have many health care professionals in my riding, and they tell me that the system is in danger of falling apart. I know that health care is huge and complex, and there are a hundred sides to every story. We are often told that health care systems all over Canada are strained, every jurisdiction is underfunded, everywhere they're struggling to hire enough doctors and nurses. And we're told that young people might not want to work full time anymore, they want a travelling lifestyle, so we just have to accept that agency nurses and locum doctors are inevitable. But I don't accept that there is nothing we can do.

What I know is that the foundation of any health care system is our staff. It may be unrealistic to aim for all full-time stuff and we may always need to fill in some gaps with temporary workers but without a strong core of resident health care professionals, the system collapses. The good news is that we seem to be doing well at recruiting new resident doctors and nurses who do actually want to live here, but our retention is dismal. The burnout rate is high. What I hear from health care staff is that they are exhausted and overwhelmed. They are frightened and demoralized by the prospect of decreasing standards of patient care with too few staff per shift. They're constantly being asked to work overtime and come in on their scheduled days off.

Salaried nurses work alongside entry level agency nurses who could be making twice as much money as them. Doctors, even those who want to live in the NWT, are quitting and becoming locums because they are fed up dealing with an administrative system that seems more interested in policing them than in supporting them. And perhaps in an attempt to find cost savings, NTHSSA has increasingly

been going to arbitration with staff, fighting over their access to benefits --

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Yellowknife North -- thank you.

---Unanimous consent granted

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So in trying to pinch pennies, we are costing our system dearly. Increasing hostility and miscommunication between staff and administration lead to a downward spiral of morale and an increasing spiral of costs.

Mr. Speaker, we need to put resident health care professionals at the centre of any strategy moving forward, to communicate clearly with them, to find out what they need to avoid burnout, to treat them as partners in designing a sustainable health care system. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 74-20(1):
 NWT PARKS AND RECREATION
 ASSOCIATION ON-THE-LAND AWARD
 WINNERS

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Good afternoon, colleagues. Today I am honoured to recognize the NWT Recreation and Parks Association On-the-Land Award winners Ashley Okrainec, Megan Okrainec, and Rosa Wright from Fort Simpson.

During the spring of 2023, the community of Liidlil Kue faced multiple stressors and issues that were leading to some divide. These three ladies, mother and two daughters, stepped up to address the need for community healing by organizing a community moose hide camp at the Fort Simpson Territorial Campground for three days and welcomed all community members to participate. They set up meals, had hides ready for scrapping and tanning, and taught people how to work on hides. As well, there were sewing tents and activities for children set up. They were encouraging people to come and visit, have tea, and eat traditional food together. It was an amazing experience.

Megan and Ashley both bring their love for the land and for traditional practices and food to their work and their mother Rosa is always open to sharing her knowledge of moose hide tanning with the community. At a difficult time, these ladies showed us all how to come together in a good, positive way, and they are all leaders in their own ways. I can tell you these amazing women have a huge impact on the community because they walk the talk. They take youth out on the land and use land-based practices in their work. These three women are

leaders on the land learning in the community because they lead by example and share their skills and knowledge with others. They welcome people to participate, whether in teaching people to fish for their families, in cooking programs or moose hide tanning camps.

Colleagues, these Gwich'in women are doing the everyday work of infusing culture into daily practice to revitalize culture and deserve to be recognized for their quiet leadership and this award. I would like to thank NWTRPA and the nominator for recognizing these three amazing ladies and the community who will be giving them their award during this year's Beavertail Jamboree. Thank you.

Members' statements. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Great Slave.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would wish to recognize a few different folks. Two of the pages here today are from my riding. That would be Ms. Jack Penny and Hamza Abouhagar, pardon my pronunciation. Thank you for being with us here today.

And also, I would like to recognize my past co-worker from environment and climate change, Ms. Tasha Alexie who is here today to hear about the annual report. Thank you for joining us.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize three of the pages that are helping us out here today from Yellowknife North. We have Kijel Ulbricht, Kaize Roach, and Kate McShane. Thank you for your work here today. And a visitor in the gallery from my riding, Georgina Rolt.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to say there are three pages here working from Yellowknife South. Always pleased to have their support and assistance. Michael Bell, Caleb Doering, and Seth Gordon. Thank you for all your help here today.

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Yellowknife South. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. If we missed anyone in the gallery today, welcome to your Chambers. I hope you are

enjoying the proceedings. It is always nice to see people in the gallery.

Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing committee and special committee. Return to oral questions. Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 52-20(1): ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE STATUS

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, of course the fiscal situation appears to be dire, which means we need to find new revenues or make some cuts. And I think Northerners would much prefer revenues over cuts. So I'd like to ask the Minister of Finance what is our accounts receivable situation? I understand in particular Nunavut does owe us quite a bit of health care costs. Can she speak to how much we're owed as a government? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, accounts receivable, March of last year, which would be the last time that it comes out with an actual, was at around \$131 million. And of that, there is a significant amount that is due to the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority. There is ongoing work happening within the authority to make sure that they are billing back timely. So every time someone from outside of territory with a different health care card is in the territory, that does create, for example, an accounts receivable balance. And as I said, I know they are alive to it.

I believe the Member has also asked a second question with respect to Nunavut. Mr. Speaker, there is some accounts receivable owing as well. I believe roughly at around \$10 to \$12 million, and that's where Nunavut residents may be passing through our territory and, again, typically is when they're receiving health and social services here within the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that's \$131 million is a pretty big chunk of that \$150 million. So we've solved our financial challenges if we just collect on our debts. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that is definitely part of the kind of work that we want to be doing and making a really strong effort to ensure that we

are, in fact, adhering to current industry best practices. These are exactly the conversations to be had, not only about making cuts and certainly not about making cuts to programs and services that people depend on, but looking at what we can do to encourage all departments, every agency, to be maintaining the standards to accounts receivable. Right now, that is if invoices are 30 days or more past due, we want to be making sure that every -- again, every department and every agency and all the authorities are taking those steps. It can creep up incrementally in one department or one agency and that was what will lead us into a bad situation. That can't happen, Mr. Speaker. I'm committed to following through on that. That's exactly why we're putting ourselves forward with an ambitious fiscal response or a fiscal plan, and I appreciate bringing attention to it. Thank you

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister for those commitments. The GNWT has often whispered about a sales tax in the past. Is the sales tax going to be on the table for this government? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Pretty quiet whispers, Mr. Speaker. I don't think I've heard anyone whispering those words. Sales tax at this point would obviously have a pretty significant cost increase to individuals and residents. We are already finding that the cost of living -- anecdotally people say all the time the cost of living is very high. And the recent years and a number of challenges we faced have only made those challenges worse for everyone. So there's no whispers of a sales tax at this point, Mr. Speaker. We're going to have to see what we can do with the government to make sure that we're best utilizing our funds in a way that delivers programs and services but can also bring our fiscal house into order. Thank you.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister. So another area that Northerners often talk about is taxing people who work in the Northwest Territories but don't live here. We have a payroll tax system and a tax benefit that accomplishes that. Are we maximizing those benefits to the Northwest Territories' public purse through that system? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there is certainly a concern that gets raised that too many people are working in the North, benefitting from high

median wages, which do maintain -- ours too continue to be very high and yet aren't actually providing to any sort of tax revenue here. So with that in mind, some years ago, a payroll tax at 2 percent of employment income was imposed. And we bring about \$48 million in payroll tax. About \$10 million of that is coming from non-resident workers, Mr. Speaker. So as far as we're maximizing it, obviously increased taxes you increase revenues, but at some point you do start to have impacts on local residents. It is offset for local residents because there are other tax measures, such as the northern resident deduction, available to those who stay in the North. They're not -- the two aren't tied together but in that sense while you might be paying the right payroll tax here if you live here, you're also getting some significant tax benefits.

Mr. Speaker, asking, though, if we were to change -- if you change any of these systems, you always increase revenue, but you may be impacting on residents, and that's the balance we have to strike. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Finance. Oral questions. Member from Great Slave.

QUESTION 53-20(1):
MAINTENANCE OF RENTAL UNITS

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Justice. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister explain what mechanisms are in place to address repair and maintenance of tenant units? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So in terms of the government's role in the repair and maintenance of privately-owned residential units, we have the Residential Tenancies Act and, of course, this is administered by the NWT rental officer. The act requires landlords to maintain premises in a state of repair -- a good state of repair and fit for habitation, and they must comply with all the applicable health and safety legislation that we have in the territory. The rental officer, if a constituent -- or sorry, if a resident is having an issue with their unit and they believe it is not being maintained to those standards, they can make an application to the rental officer. The rental officer can provide an order that would authorize the tenant to remedy the situation, essentially do the repairs, and then get that money back from the landlord. The act can -- there can be orders requiring a landlord to compensate the tenant if there are damages to the tenant's goods because of the state of

repair of the unit. And the landlord is required to remedy the breach pursuant to the order within ten days of receiving that order, and there are fines if the landlord does not comply with that. Thank you.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that. And, yes, I do realize that the NWT rental office has that capacity but they also, in their annual report, state that the office receives many inquiries from tenants regarding landlord obligations to repair but have little follow through. So my question is can the Minister review the tenant complaint process under the rental office to remove any challenges that tenants face to address landlord obligations to repair? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the Residential Tenancies Act will be reviewed during this government so all of those issues can be looked at. The access to the rental officer, any barriers that tenants might be facing; we can look at all of that. I cannot commit to remove any barrier that a tenant might be facing, but we do want to make the process as easy and simple as possible so that we can achieve the goals of the act. Thank you.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, from previous discussions held in this House, which included tabled photographs of infestations of tenant units, there are sometimes ongoing environmental health concerns in residential units. So can the Minister please explain how the NWT rental office works with other government departments to monitor the environmental health and safety of units? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the rental office enforces the Residential Tenancies Act, and that is applicable when there is an agreement between a tenant and the landlord. So while there are other government entities that may monitor environmental health, such as the environment health unit in the department of health of the fire marshal with MACA, those entities are not part of that contract between a landlord and a tenant. So there is an onus on the tenants who actually do that work and bring forward those concerns to the rental officer. The government isn't going to go and inspect people's units and bring forward issues to the rental officer on behalf of tenants. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Final supplementary. Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Based on his previous answer, I don't think the Minister

will commit to what I'm asking but I will ask all the same. Could the Minister commit to provide an interdepartmental response to address tenant concerns with respect to environmental health in tenant units? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So during this Assembly, I look forward to seeing how we can address some of the issues that we face with housing at large in the territory. I know when we talk about housing, it's often subsidized housing but there's issues with market housing as well. And so with that focus and with the review of the Residential Tenancies Act, I think we can make some progress in this area. But as I stated before, it's up to the individual to bring forward their complaints. It would be ideal if we had the people and the budget to go around and do these inspections and have a very collaborative cross-departmental approach to ensuring peoples' living conditions are safe, but there is an onus on the individual to bring forward their concerns. And if they're facing issues accessing the rental officer, I encourage them to contact the rental officer and have discussions because they're not just there to enforce orders and issue orders. They are there to provide information as well. Alternatively, I encourage tenants to consult with their MLAs. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 54-20(1):
PUBLIC RELEASE OF POLICIES BEFORE
INPUT BY MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to quote Premier Simpson: It does take time to work together, but that is important. Mr. Speaker, that was said on November 27th by Premier Simpson.

Mr. Speaker, my questions for Premier Simpson is how is he meeting those objectives, the hallmarks of consensus government, by publicly -- by allowing publicly the release of carbon tax policy and the restoring fiscal balance plan to the public in advance of working with Members? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So those documents, those are under the Department of Finance, so I'd like to redirect that to the Minister of Finance. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Premier. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're all happy to share on this side of the House. Mr. Speaker, the carbon tax regulations that were changed came about as a result, quite frankly, of a significant amount of outcry by the public. So it was very apparent that members of the public were wondering when they would see an equivalent amount of relief to what was being promised by other jurisdictions across Canada, the regulations lie within the Department of Finance to make those changes, and in response to what was really a very strong, very clear request from the public those changes were made to, again, to a regulation, not a policy matter but to a regulation.

With respect to the second question, Mr. Speaker, that of the fiscal strategy, Mr. Speaker, just a little over a year ago there was a review of the Fiscal Responsibility Policy, and the response from committee, which is available publicly, was very clear that a fiscal strategy should be done by the government to help manage the finances of the government in order to achieve priorities and mandate. But committee at that point was very clear in saying that that is not a document that they wanted to be responsible for but committee at the time in fact said you go make sure you do it, and we're going to hold you to account for it.

So it was shared with Members, Mr. Speaker, but -- and it was thought, quite frankly, that by sharing it and getting it out, we'd be in a position to set our priorities knowing what would be going on rather than turning around and then having Cabinet go off and come up with a Fiscal Responsibility Policy. This way it was all out in the open and was available to Members and to the members of the public in advance. It's a guiding document for policy -- or for the government, Mr. Speaker. It's not a policy, and it's not a law. It is something that holds us to account for how we're spending the public dollars. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the Minister, not the Premier in this case obviously, has just said public -- their public position is they're responding to the cries of the public, not to Members. That's what I just heard. And she said it was shared to get it out there but my letter to my office says confidential. So how am I supposed to share it? So, Mr. Speaker, my question, I guess for the Finance Minister, who is a recycled Minister from the last government, is how are Members supposed to share confidential documents when you stamp them confidential and you get to publicly release them without discussing them with committee members first?

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER: Cabin Radio.

MR. SPEAKER: Members, please direct your questions to this Chair, not to the Member or the Minister. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the carbon tax changes and the removal of the home heating fuel element, that was certainly, at least from all of the media that I was hearing, was a fairly clear and strong public outcry.

With respect to the fiscal strategy, Mr. Speaker, and its being shared, it is being shared confidentially. There's a lot of documents that get shared confidentially between Members and Cabinet, and then after that period of time it does get shared out publicly depending -- and Members can or cannot respond or can or cannot provide their comments on these documents that get shared. But that -- there's two different things that are being talked about in this question, two very different things that are being talked about in this series of questions. Carbon tax policy, carbon tax regulations, and then a fiscal strategy to guide the government finances. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my next question is for the Finance Minister is when is committee going to matter? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to speak to that. Mr. Speaker, I spent a fair bit of time in front of committee last Assembly. I expect I'll spend a lot of time in front of committee again. I've also already made efforts to share information with committee, both in terms of sharing the fiscal strategy, which I'll note, Mr. Speaker, in the past, certainly in the four years ago and my knowledge of past Assemblies, a fiscal strategy was not shared in advance, was not shared with committee, was not made public. We've already made better than that. We shared with committee. We then took it out to the public. We're making it open. We're being transparent about it. So I'm not sure exactly what it is that the Member takes issue with me in the course of a few days. I've certainly made every effort to reach out as I've said, make myself available, make myself available to committee Members, have meetings with stakeholders, meetings with members of the public, whoever wants to talk about these things with me. And I'm happy to do the same with this committee and with this Member. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Finance. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister talks as if she's still in the

19th Assembly. Mr. Speaker, this is about the 20th Assembly making these decisions, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the Minister clearly and simply will she work with committee in advance of releasing this information? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, if he would like longer periods of notice in advance of documents, I guess we'll have to find a longer period of time as much as is available. It wasn't much time that we had to turn around coming up with a fiscal strategy in order to have it to Members and then to the public in advance of the priority setting, which seemed like a responsible way of going about things. But I will certainly endeavour to make sure that there's a longer period of time that the Member has these documents before they're made public. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister. Oral questions. Member from the Sahtu.

QUESTION 55-20(1):
TERRITORIAL REGIONAL WELLNESS
COUNCILS

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier I had mentioned the review on regional territorial regional councils. My first question to the Minister of health is can the Minister explain the governing structure of the Territorial Leadership Council and the regional wellness councils? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Member from the Sahtu. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in -- I think when -- like the Member said, in 2016, I think we transferred into the territorial NTHSSA, and they are governed by the leadership council. So the leadership council Board of Management is made up of regional wellness council chairs. So every region in the Northwest Territories that used to have a board or an authority amalgamated into the NTHSSA, and then they created regional wellness councils. So the regional wellness councils are basically the advisory council for that region but their chair is the member that sits at the leadership council which is the governing council, the management for the NTHSSA, and then they have a chair and all of the members are appointed by the Minister that sit there. And so that's the makeup of the NTHSSA governing council. Thank you.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the reply to the Minister. My next question there, Mr. Speaker, is looking at the structure and how to update that from 2016, will the Minister conduct a governance review of the

TLC and regional wellness councils to review on recommendations for updating this current system? Mahsi.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes, and a review has been done. I think it was a recommendation from the 19th Assembly that a review be done on this, and there was a review done. It was finalized late in the end of the last Assembly and so the department right now is working -- the department of health is working with NTHSSA and the Department of Finance to review and analyze the report and its recommendations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister share that review with this side of the House here so we can see what work has been done and what policy recommendations, particularly the recommendations themselves, to the review? Mahsi.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, it is my intent to share this review with -- to share this review publicly. I think right now what we're doing as a department is taking the review and reviewing it with different pieces with the recommendations that have been provided, and then we'll be sharing that publicly. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Member from the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When?

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I got elected and got my portfolio and had my last briefing before I arrived here for session, session will be completed the end of the month, and then I'm hoping that I, myself, the NTHSSA, my department, the finance department, will be able to have a fulsome review of the recommendations and the report and then we'll be able to get that information out to the Members and to the public. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

QUESTION 56-20(1):
PAUSING OF COLLECTIONS FROM
INDIGENOUS CABIN LEASE HOLDERS

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's response to Motion 77-19(2) that effective immediately that the GNWT will pause collection actions on any outstanding arrears for lease fees from Indigenous recreational

leaseholders; however, on August 2023, the department states Indigenous people may be eligible to and need to contact ECC to confirm eligibility. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of ECE. Are collections actions paused on Indigenous people with recreational leases with asserted or established rights areas? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for the question. The department is committed to pausing collection actions for Indigenous leaseholders with lease fees that are in arrears.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I believe I heard that the collections are paused on Members -- on leaseholders with leases that are in arrears. Will the Minister immediately pause collections on all Indigenous people's recreational leases as stated in the response?

HON. JAY MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, at this time there is a pause on lease fees for Indigenous leaseholders as we work forward with the Indigenous governments on a process to determine how we can collaborate and come up with a better way to address this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of ECC. And, please, direct your comments to me, not the colleagues across the other side. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell me has the department reached out to the Indigenous governments and what extent has that conversation taken place?

HON. JAY MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the department has been collaborating with the Indigenous governments. There were bilateral meetings in June of 2023 regarding the Indigenous leaseholders' cabins, and since that time there's been additional engagements to have conversations around working toward a long-term approach of how we can deal with this issue. The Indigenous governments have identified over 700 structures that belong to Indigenous people and cabins, and we are currently, as a department, working with the Indigenous governments to ensure that we can verify collaboratively with them that we are engaging with all of the Indigenous leaseholders to ensure that we're not moving forward and posting on Indigenous cabins. There's also some collaborative meetings scheduled for March of 2024. Invitations have been sent to all of the Indigenous governments to come to two

sessions. One will be held in Inuvik, and one will be held in Hay River to discuss the lease process and how we can work toward a solution. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of ECC. Final supplementary. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm encouraged by the Minister's comments that they are working with the Indigenous governments on this. I think given that the fact that, again, this House where, you know, we're committed to working closer with our Indigenous governments, with our partners, and my question is would the Minister entertain, then, axing the lease costs for any Indigenous cabin in an established rights area? Thank you.

HON. JAY MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. The Department of Environment and Climate Change is working closely with the Indigenous governments and the Indigenous organizations in a collaborative approach to determine what is the best solution to this and how we can resolve this together through collaboration and having discussions and ensuring that it's not solely a Government of the Northwest Territories' decision but it's one that is engaging with the Indigenous governments and the Indigenous organizations to ensure that their feedback is heard and that we're working collaboratively, as you've said, as we move forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of ECC. Oral questions. Member from Frame Lake.

QUESTION 57-20(1):
HEALTHCARE STAFFING IMPACTS

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, earlier I spoke about the importance of nursing aides to our health care system. My question is for the health Minister. What actions are being taken to mitigate staffing impacts associated with federal COVID funding ending? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear. There seems to be confusion around this, and there -- so within this announcement, I guess what happened was that there is COVID funding that is ending at the end of this fiscal year but there is no layoffs in the NTHSSA as a result of this sunseting funding. It's important to understand that many positions that were

added in this -- with this funding were never -- we were never able to staff them, so we were using what we used as casuals. We used float. We used relief workers in a lot of these positions to make sure that these extra positions were filled. And so the staffing impacts associated with this COVID funding has not -- you know, there hasn't been -- we're not saying any layoffs or anything like that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Okay, that's an interesting response from the Minister. I guess my question is I believe that people were given the impression there would be layoffs. There was a story in the news. I've heard from constituents about this. So how is the department been communicating about these changes and how did we get to the point where we're in a miscommunication about whether there's going to be layoffs or not? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there has been communication with the people that have been in these positions. They have been communicated since the beginning of the positions. Anybody -- there were some positions that were transfer assignment. They're going back to their home position. The majority of the people that are filling these positions, as I've mentioned are casual, either the float pool, or they're relief positions. And I think some of the communications initially went that there are -- and this is kind of what I tried to explain. I'm trying to explain it in a way that people will understand is COVID funding funded beds. And so some beds are closing under this funding which means it doesn't mean we're going to go in and we're going to tape up beds in the hospital and we're not going to use them. It just means that the level of staffing that needed for COVID and the acuteness of those patients, we had to increase the number of patients -- or the number of staff. And that's what COVID funding did. You know, and I've heard the Member. I've heard from multiple Members.

I've heard from community. I've heard from nurses, you know, and I've heard, you know, from their families that the staff at the Stanton Hospital here in Yellowknife, they're concerned because of the messaging around the end of the COVID funding. But today I announced these \$36 million in funding is which these positions, there's going to be new positions created in some of these units. And so when I -- when we talk about a lot of the -- what's going away from COVID, we've been able to integrate a lot of those positions into these new fundings and so -- and I hear the Members, and we know that the nursing levels that the acuteness

of the patients, people are sicker now, and we know that. We've heard that. Like, the department knows that. The NTHSSA knows that. And we're working within all of the different things that we have to ensure that the staff are supported, that they have what they need, and we will not, you know, jeopardize patient care. That is not something that I will do as the Minister. Thank you.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No further questions.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

QUESTION 58-20(1):
CAPITAL PLANNING WITH PARTNERS
ACCORDING TO PRIORITIES

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in the 19th Assembly, I brought forward the austerity to the Finance Minister of the day, and they said they won't be dealing with austerity in the 19th Assembly but the can was kicked to the 20th Assembly. Here we are with \$150 million a year. Over a four-year period, that's \$600 million.

My question to the Minister is can the Minister commit to working openly with MLAs, Indigenous governments, leaders of their respective communities, to implement the GNWT four priorities and to prevent unilateral budget cuts and layoffs that will harm relationship and trust between them and the GNWT government? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that is certainly a role that I think every Member of the House would be taking seriously, and I certainly would do so as well within my capacity. As part of the budgeting process, Mr. Speaker, I instituted and intend to continue doing a budget dialogue process. It's an opportunity where I have specific meetings with Indigenous governments here or within the Northwest Territories. I also have a separate specific meeting with NWTAC, the representation for the municipalities, then do public sessions and sessions with other stakeholders. These are going to be upcoming before building the 2024-2025 Main Estimates.

With respect to as well to employees, Mr. Speaker, we've had over 300 responses already. In fact, probably more now in the last few days to a portal set up for employees. I have myself begun to look through those responses personally. I've sent them to my colleagues. There are some pretty exceptional

ideas on there. And we are going to be having a town hall discussion with our employees as well. So lots of opportunities to engage.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would think it goes without saying that the business planning process involves Members and committees quite intimately as well in terms of reviewing plans and discussing plans and giving feedback to departments. So that's a long answer. The short answer is yes. Thank you.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. When the Minister refers to increasing revenue sources to help balance the budget, does that mean she's considering a new tax increase? If so, what kind of tax increase are on the table? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's not lost on anyone that the challenges in the last few years have put a lot of strain on households, on businesses, and there's little appetite or capacity arguably even for tax increases. But beyond that, Mr. Speaker, tax revenues are a pretty small slice of the revenues that we receive. The Government of Canada transfers in various forms; in particular TFF. That's our major source of revenue, up to 80 percent. So taxes are not right now what we're looking at. We're right now trying to figure out everywhere and every other option available to us. That could also be increases for fees for services, increases on fees that are charged on licenses. But, again, this is part of the discussion that we've kicked off and hope to continue to have. Thank you.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many examples of public/private partnerships that have resulted in major cost overruns and delays. Will the department review the circumstances of the cost overruns to ensure future projects stay on time and on budget? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's also some pretty exceptional examples of public/private partnerships that came in on time and on budget not the least of which is the Tlicho All-Season Road. That said, I do agree that there is certainly a need to ensure that all capital planning has a good news story at the end of the day no matter what the financing arrangement might be. There's been some changes in the last Assembly to the capital planning process to have more planning, to have more dollars in the planning so that the cost estimates that we have are of a greater certainty and that we have that certainty when we go out to actually put the dollars out. So

thank you for the question. Again, I think it's important but there's a lot of work happening in that space already, and we do expect Members to hold us to account as we go forward on that one to make sure we're achieving it. Thank you

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplementary. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the 19th Assembly I came in as an MLA for halfway through my term in the two-year period, and I couldn't really put any of my wishes onto the bus. The train already left the station. So, Mr. Speaker, I put forward a letter to the Premier outlining the priorities for my four communities. So my question would be to the Minister. I have shared a letter with the Minister that I sent to the Premier which laid out my priorities for my communities. Can the Minister commit to reviewing these priorities and considering them when working -- when work begins on the budget and focus on the four top priorities? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously setting the priorities of the Assembly is work that we've all collectively just done, and the next step is to ensure that there's a mandate to help achieve those priorities. Obviously, that's work that happens by all Members of Cabinet, including myself, and I believe will be work that involves back and forth to Members of the Assembly including the Member who's asking the question. So as that process is underway, I'm hopeful and confident that it can continue to be a dialogue and one that will see reflection of everyone that's here. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Finance. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife North.

QUESTION 59-20(1):
RETENTION STRATEGIES FOR
HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. So noting in the Minister's statement today that one of our current initiatives is employee engagement for retention, can the Minister describe any specific retention strategy that we currently have in place that would hopefully lead us to decrease our reliance on agency nurses and locum doctors? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if -- I want to answer that as best as I

can but I might -- you might cut me off. So I'll highlight some of the areas. And I want to be clear that, you know, it's important to note that the use of agency nurses is always the last resort. It's aimed at preventing unit or health care -- health centre closures and to increase -- to keep adequate staffing levels, you know, and we've seen that we've had to close areas in our health care before. And right now -- and I -- you know, I'll continue to repeat it because it is across Canada that we're having a health care shortage of all types of health care workers. So as specific to the retention strategies that we are doing, there are -- it is very multifaceted depending on nurses, doctors, you know, and so we're guided by the Northwest Territories health and social services system human resource plan, and with particularly goal number 4 which emphasizes increased employee engagement throughout organizational change and leadership development.

We've introduced several initiatives to address recruitment and retention, and some of those just to be on time are new measures like using paramedic use in different areas that we would normally not use to make up for that. The friends and family travel program, and that was used over Christmas of last year. Referral programs, so people that -- nurses or other health care professionals can refer somebody they know and if they get an indeterminate position out of it, they'll get a financial bonus for that. And we've had a couple so far with that.

Reimbursing of licensing fees for locum physicians; we've always done that for nurses. The creation of onboarding specialist positions. The covering of international travel costs for NWT, for Canadian health care professionals living abroad who wish to relocate to the NWT and work, recruitment and retention bonuses. So these are some of the things that, you know, we've done, and, you know, I hear the Member -- and employee engagement is important and so, you know, if there's areas that we're not engaging or we're not hearing from the Members, I would like to work with the Members on that side of the House to be able to come up with some -- like, better ways to engage with staff. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a followup, can the Minister explain how we're monitoring progress on retention over time? So specifically on retention, I know it's easy to combine recruitment and retention, but I'm specifically talking about retention in this case, but are we monitoring progress and monitoring retention rates over time and publishing the results of that?

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you know, I think the NTHSSA right now is continuously trying to -- they're monitoring employee engagement through formal mechanisms as surveys and formal means like all staff meetings, daily newsletters that go out to all staff, a robust information hub for staff in line with the NTHSSA system. And then, you know, with other areas and -- but, again, like I hear from the Member, you know, I worked in that area. You're busy. You're working. You're not working normal hours. So when you're not able to access the information through certain ways, and, again, if there's better ways to engage with staff, then, you know, if the Members have some ideas, let's work together to figure out how do we get all of the information that our staff need and that their feedback is important to us, ensuring that they have -- you know, that they're happy in their jobs. We want them to be here and stay here. So we know we're recruiting them, retraining them. We're working on that data, and, you know, and I think that's where this new -- the new agreement that was announced today, there's actually positions in there that's going to help emphasize that engagement with staff and, you know, exit interviews and things like that. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that the Minister might not have this data at her fingertips now, but can the Minister commit to providing Members with the total cost spent on agency nurses and locum doctors for this past fiscal year and compare that to pre-COVID times showing trends over time, so providing the stats on cost spent on agency nurses and locum doctors over time?

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't have that level of detail for the Member, so I'll have to get back to the Member for that. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: I will just add a final request is whether the Minister can commit to providing us with similar statistics on overtime costs from -- I would like it specifically for Stanton Hospital that show trends over the past decade from pre-COVID to the present. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you know, as a past manager I know that the managers get this, and it's highlighted, and so managers are -- as part of their regular variance review have this information. So I can get back to the Member on, like, just for Stanton and those specific details. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member from the Deh Cho.

QUESTION 60-20(1):
SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of ECE. Mr. Speaker, can the ECE Minister explain what her department is doing to support Indigenous languages in the NWT? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Deh Cho. Minister for ECE.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member, first off, for reflecting on the fact that this is the only jurisdiction that has a whole month dedicated to Indigenous Languages Month, and so I very much appreciate that. The theme this month is Say It In Our Language, and I also want to thank the Member for speaking her language in the House here with us on a regular basis.

In addition to Indigenous Languages Month that's celebrated every February, Mr. Speaker, ECE continues to partner with seven Indigenous governments to deliver the mentor apprenticeship program. In 2023-2024, we had a record 56 pairs participant in the program and I had the honour of speaking with them last week, which I really absolutely appreciated their feedback. In addition, the department offers ten annual \$5,000 scholarship for Indigenous languages revitalization, and I think it's worth noting that there was so much interest in this scholarship for 2022-2023 year that a record number of 18 scholarships were actually awarded to residents interested in that scholarship. And so the department's very dedicated to language revitalization.

Mr. Speaker, in addition, the department is currently exploring future development of a two-year pilot program for Indigenous languages diploma program, which is another good news story for our territory. And ECE currently leads the implementation of the NWT Indigenous Languages Action Plan. This action plan has two overarching pieces to it. The first is languages revitalization and the second is access to public services from the government in Indigenous languages, which is another key component of language revitalization in the territory.

And then in addition to that, ECE negotiates and administers the Canada-NWT agreement for Indigenous languages on behalf of the Government of the Northwest Territories. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister, for that. Mr. Speaker, with the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university, is the

Minister aware of any plans for the new institution to bring back the accredited interpreter training program for Indigenous languages that used to exist in the 1990s? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are in a position now where the Aurora College is at an arm's length relationship from the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. That being said, ECE does provide funding for interpreters to support training through the interpreter-translator funding program, and there's also connections with other jurisdictions to explore possible training options for future interpreters. And I think it's also worth noting here the Indigenous language instructor employment plan that is currently a pilot within the Beaufort Delta and the Deh Cho regions as well in the territory. And this pilot focuses on the recruitment of Indigenous languages instructors in the Northwest Territories and provides Indigenous language speakers with the opportunity to stay in their community while they're developing language skills to become successful language instructors. So I think that's another key program. And there's currently five pairs taking part in that program in the territory. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister assure the public that if and when interpreter services are required when accessing government services that interpretation services will be made available and provided in a timely manner? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think this is a really important question, and I can't assure the Member what she is looking for here today from me. But access to services in Indigenous languages are found in section 11(2) of the Official Languages Act, and that guarantees that people have the right to communicate with and access government services in Indigenous languages from their community area and also regional offices. So the Member reflected previously on the disbandment of the languages bureau in 1997. And since then, each Minister is now responsible for the delivery of programs and services of their departments in Indigenous languages, each of us individually and independently, and that that should be done in accordance with both the Official Languages Act and also official languages policies that all government departments are responsible and accountable to.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, Indigenous languages, service standards are currently under development within the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. And this will help employees of government departments understand the service delivery requirements for each of us, for each of our departments, and to provide specific direction, advice, and recommendations on various service scenarios and how that can look in practice across the government. And once that is done, once it's released, ECE will also provide training to government employees on their role within that service delivery model. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary. Member from the Deh Cho.

Member from Mackenzie Delta.

QUESTION 61-20(1):
TSIIGEHTCHIC ACCESS TO HEALTH AND
JUSTICE SERVICES

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Premier. Like before me, Mr. Fredrick Blake, before him was Mr. David Krutko, before him was Mr. Richard Nerysoo. They all lobbied for the services of Tsiigehtchic to get health services and police RCMP services for the community of Tsiigehtchic because they're on the highway system. They're easy access to drugs and alcohol and other crime. My question is will the Premier commit to start and continue the process of trying to get these services to Tsiigehtchic as soon as possible? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Mackenzie Delta. Mr. Premier.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking as the Minister of Justice, I can tell the Members that the conversations about resourcing in the Northwest Territories for RCMP are ongoing. There's always conversations happening. The RCMP are looking at their workload and bringing forward proposals to the GNWT. So that's always happening.

In the Member's region, we've added, I believe, RCMP every year since I've been Minister. So we have been increasing the number of RCMP in the territory, including at Fort McPherson, and that is the community that serves Tsiigehtchic. So while it's not a perfect situation and I understand that it's still, you know, a 45-minute drive if everything goes well from McPherson to Tsiigehtchic, hopefully that additional officer in McPherson will help free up other members and so they can respond more quickly. But we are continuing to work with the

RCMP. Where they see the operational need being the greatest, that's where we look to add resources. Thank you.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take note to the Minister's response. I don't think that is satisfactory to the residents of Tsiigehtchic. That's making more reference to the community of Fort McPherson.

My question is will the Minister engage with his federal counterparts and local Indigenous governments to find a process where we can find services for the community of Tsiigehtchic? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And like I said, we're always having those conversations. The RCMP, they are a federal entity, but they are contracted by the GNWT, and so an increase in service in one area is -- it goes through the GNWT, so. And I think that if we work for the RCMP and we wanted additional officers in there, that's what was deemed necessary, then we could do that without the federal government. But I'm always having conversations with Indigenous leaders and communities about justice, access to justice, drugs, and the RCMP, and I'm happy to continue those.

I'm sorry, I don't have a better answer for the Member. I know that, as he mentioned, this has been ongoing through many, many MLAs, many who have served multiple terms, and so this is not a new issue. But -- and I'm -- you know, I feel for some of the stories I've heard the Member tell and others tell about a lack of services in Tsiigehtchic and what that results in, and it is concerning, and we do continue to try and provide services in the best way that we can knowing that we don't have unlimited resources. Thank you.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the new polytechnical university being proposed in the future, would there be -- in partnership with the education department, will they be able to implement some paramedic courses or some special constable or security courses to be implemented into this polytechnical university to help alleviate some of these problems within Tsiigehtchic? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And so as was mentioned earlier, the polytechnic or the Aurora College is now arm's length, and it is governed by a board. That being said, if there is a case for a program and there's money attached to it, then the college can always look at delivering that if we have a funder. I will note that the RCMP, they do try to recruit Northerners. They have a program, a

three-week program in Regina, at depot, where Indigenous potential recruits can go for three weeks to see what they think of the program. Right now, there is -- I believe there is a few residents in the territory who are looking at attending that. There's a couple residents who are in depot training to be RCMP officers. There's a few more who are partway through that process of making their way to depot, and there's another half dozen who are at the beginning of that process. So there are opportunities for Northerners to train to be RCMP officers, and the RCMP proactively go out and hold information sessions and try and do outreach to let people know about those. And so, yes, there is a possibility at the polytechnic. That's something that could happen. But in the meantime, there are efforts underway to train Northerners to be RCMP officers, and I encourage all the MLAs to let their constituents know that is an option for people in the territory. I'm getting the wrap it up sign, so I'll stop it there. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplementary. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 62-20(1):
CONSULTATION WITH MEMBERS OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ON POLICIES
AND STRATEGIES

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you, colleagues. I think everybody should enjoy the thanks. And clerks table too. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to return to the GNWT fiscal sustainable strategy released. And, Mr. Speaker, this release is not an options paper. This release is not a discussion paper. It's a manifesto for the 20th Assembly. They clearly outlined that this strategy is looking at our financial situation, and they clearly state that proposed changes resulting in this review will be reflected in the upcoming budget that we'll see in days. Not weeks, not months.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier, if he has the ability to answer this question, I certainly hope he has the courage to answer it, is this the new policy to not have fulsome discussion and debate with committee members on major shifts like this? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Of course not, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm going to say thank you to the Premier for

that. At least it's direct, it's honest, and it's straightforward.

Mr. Speaker, in their policy release, that strategy, they talk about consulting with employees, not Members of the -- such as us as the MLAs. They talk about the -- the Finance Minister mentioned she had crushing public pressure and outcry to make decisions. My question for them is why are they going to employees through an internal survey that they can be individually identified to act like a rat squad to tell the government where to cut and save money? Because the employees are feeling nervous and threatened. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Please be politically correct. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As that's not in my department, I'm going to have to take that on notice. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Premier has taken it as notice. Time is up for oral questions.

Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to Commissioner's address. Petitions. Tabling of documents. Member from the Deh Cho.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 27-20(1):
PETITION: DEMAND A PUBLIC INQUIRY
INTO THE HAY RIVER-ENTERPRISE-
KAKISA WILDFIRE

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I would like to take a petition to demand a public inquiry into the Hay River-Kakisa-Enterprise wildfire. This petition does not strictly conform with our rules to be submitted as a petition, so I am submitting it as a tabled document. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Tabling of documents. Minister of Finance.

TABLED DOCUMENT 28-20(1):
SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES
(INFRASTRUCTURE EXPENDITURES), NO.
3, 2023-2024

TABLED DOCUMENT 29-20(1):
SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES
(OPERATIONS EXPENDITURES), NO. 4,
2023-2024

TABLED DOCUMENT 30-20(1):
RESTORING BALANCE: A FISCAL
SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY FOR THE 20TH
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

TABLED DOCUMENT 31-20(1):
EVACUATION SUPPORT PROGRAM DATA
AS OF FEBRUARY 14, 2024

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following four documents: Supplementary Estimates (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 3, 2023-2024; Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 4, 2023-2024; Restoring Balance: A Fiscal Sustainability Strategy for the 20th Legislative Assembly; and, Evacuation Support Program Data as of February 14th, 2024. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of finance. Tabling of documents. Member from Yellowknife North.

TABLED DOCUMENT 32-20(1):
PRIORITIES OF THE 20TH LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table the document entitled Priorities of the 20th Legislative Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Member from Yellowknife North.

Notices of Motion

MOTION 16-20(1):
APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY
CHAIRPERSONS OF COMMITTEE OF THE
WHOLE

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that on Thursday, February 22nd, 2024, I will move the following motion:

Now therefore I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Hay River North, that the Member for Deh Cho, Sheryl Yakeleya; and, the Member for Sahtu, Daniel McNeely, are hereby chosen to be the deputy chairpersons of the Committee of the Whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Notices of motions. Member from the Deh Cho.

MOTION 17-20(1):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES RESPONSE TO Tabled
DOCUMENT 28-20(1)

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Thursday, February 22nd, 2024, I will move the following motion:

Now therefore I move, second by the Member for Yellowknife North, that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a response to Tabled Document 27-20(1) and table it in this House within 120 days. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Member from the Deh Cho. Notice of motion. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MOTION 18-20(1):
APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HONOURS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Thursday, February 22nd, 2024, I will move the following motion:

Now therefore I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Kam Lake, that the following persons be recommended to the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories for appointment to the Northwest Territories Honours Advisory Council effective immediately for a term of three years:

- Ms. Jane Arychuk of Yellowknife; and,
- Ms. Denise McDonald of Inuvik.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Notices of motion. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MOTION 19-20(1):
APPOINTMENT OF EQUAL PAY
COMMISSIONER

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Thursday, February 22nd, 2024, I will move the following motion:

Now therefore I move, seconded by the Member for Kam Lake, that Ms. Renee Caron be appointed as the Equal Pay Commissioner in accordance with the Public Service Act by the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories as recommended by the Legislative Assembly;

And further, that the Speaker be authorized to communicate the effective date of the appointment to the Commissioner. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Notice of motion. Motion. Notice of motion first reading of bills. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

Notice of Motion for First Reading of Bills

BILL 1:

AN ACT TO AMEND THE LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY AND EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
ACT

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Thursday, February 22nd, 2024, I will present to the House Bill 1, An Act to Amend the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, to be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Notice of motions for first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole and other matters. Minister's Statement 4-20(1), Minister's Statement 5-20(1), Tabled Document 13-20(1), Tabled Document 20-20(1), Tabled Document 29-20(1), with the Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): I now call Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of committee?

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to consider Interim Estimates Operations Expenditures April 1st to June 30th, 2024.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you, committee. We will proceed with the first item. Open the House --

At this time, we'll take a short break, 15-minute break, and we'll come back. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 13-20(1), Interim Estimates Operating Expenditures April 1st to June 30, 2024. Minister, please proceed with your opening remarks.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'm happy to be presenting this afternoon Tabled Document 13-20(1): Interim Estimates, (Operations Expenditures), April 1st to June 30th, 2024, for the Government of the Northwest Territories. The

interim estimates will allow public services to continue to be provided until the main estimates for the fiscal year have been fully debated and approved by the Legislative Assembly.

The estimates propose a total appropriation of \$782 million for operations between April 1st and June 30th, 2024, and \$1.3 billion in borrowing for the GNWT for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

The last few years have been difficult for Northerners. Flooding, drought, wildfire events, and the global COVID pandemic have negatively impacted the government's financial capacity. In response to these challenges, the GNWT has updated its Fiscal Responsibility Policy to strengthen transparency and accountability, especially by linking the policy to the federally-imposed borrowing limit by requiring a \$120 million cushion below the borrowing limit. In addition to this, our government renewal initiative continues to build a culture within the public service to maximize efficiency and value for money and aims to ensure that the GNWT does the right things at the right time in the right way.

The recently announced Fiscal Strategy of the 20th Legislative Assembly outlines the realities of the territory's fiscal situation and sets significant targets to help support the territory's economic recovery through the life of the 20th Legislative Assembly. The strategy represents our commitment to the territory's financial health and stability, not just for us but for future generations. These interim estimates will allow departments to integrate the priorities established by this Legislative Assembly into their 2024-2025 business plans and main estimates, which I will be bringing forward during the next sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

This concludes opening remarks. I would be happy to answer questions Members may have.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you, Minister. Does the Minister of Finance wish to bring a witness into the House?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: yes.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witness into the Chamber.

Thank you. Would the Minister please introduce the witnesses.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On my left, Bill MacKay is the deputy minister of the Department of Finance. And on my right, Terence Courtoreille is the deputy secretary to the Financial Management Board.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I will now open the floor for general comments on the Minister's statement. Do any Members have any general comments before we begin? Thank you. Go to Mr. Kieron Testart, Member of Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to support the interim estimates. I see them as noncontroversial and essential to keeping the lights on for the public service until we get into the actual budgeting process in May and June. They'll be other matters, financial matters, that the House will discuss that I'll have more to say. But at this time I'm content to support these and will reserve comments. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Any further general comments from any Member? Thank you. Thank you, Member. Seeing there's no further general comments, we will review the interim estimates by department. Please turn to page 2. Does the committee agree to forego general comments on each department? Committee? Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): We will begin with the Legislative Assembly. Are there any questions from committee? Okay, I don't see any hands going up. I'll move on. Summary of interim estimates, item 1 Legislative Assembly appropriation authority required, \$5,820,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Committee, we will continue with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Are there any questions? I will go over to Shauna Morgan, Member of Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So my question is around funding for early learning and child care. I know that the department is still trying to work out a new funding mechanism for early childhood partners and that will require some upfront payments to child care providers by the end of the first quarter. And so given that my understanding is that this is still not settled yet, the new funding mechanism is in flux, can the government give us any reassurance of how they know that the estimates here will be enough to make sure that we can keep our child care providers operating and afloat given that

the new funding mechanism is still to be decided?

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, being an interim budget does mean that the departments are getting sort of roughly 20 to 25 percent of their usual -- or of their expected amount based on last year's budget, but it's not including any potential changes that may come. Any potential changes that may come as a result of the priorities setting or other initiatives that that would be part of the budget that's going forward in May and June, but there certainly is -- you know, this will give them the opportunity to at least begin their work as of April 1st. Thank you.

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

MS. MORGAN: So the government can confirm that the estimates here are based on the previous funding arrangements with child care providers and not on any estimates of a new funding mechanism?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Moving to the Finance Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is based at this moment on the agreement as it stands with Canada. I can't speak to what discussions or whether discussions are ongoing with education, culture and employment but just that at this point this is based on the agreement as it is. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Going back to Member of Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay. That's all the questions I have at this moment for -- around Education, Culture and Employment. I assume they'll be an opportunity to return when we get to other departments if -- okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Any further questions from Members? Don't see any hands. Okay, so summary of interim estimates, item 2, Education, Culture and Employment, appropriation authority required \$127,721,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Your committee will continue with the Department of Environment and Climate

Change. Is there any questions? Yes, I'm going to go to the Member of Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was wondering if, similar to my colleague from Yellowknife North's question around ECE, if the dollars for wildlife and forest management are based on previous contracts for fire suppression, aviation contracts, that sort of thing, from the previous year or if there are increases? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, contract dollars are -- so there's the department amount that's coming in as a percentage of the annual budget from 2023-2024 but the remaining -- but their contract amounts are coming in at full value which is going to allow departments to enter into contracts that will last potentially for the full year assuming further approval by the Legislative Assembly. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you, Minister. I'm going to go back to the Member of Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess I -- I'll rephrase what I guess I'm trying to seek which is I do understand that it is for contracts that are based for the full fiscal year, but I'm curious as to whether that contract amount has increased from the previous fiscal year. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Sorry, Mr. Chair, I'm having some trouble hearing. I think it is -- actually maybe I think Mr. Courtoreille heard it so let me pass it over to him, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll go back to the Member of Great Slave -- oh, Mr. Courtoreille.

MR. TERENCE COURTOREILLE: Thanks, Mr. Chair. And my apologies, I didn't hear the question. I'll have to ask the Member to repeat it.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Going back to the Member of Great Slave.

MS. REID: Certainly. Thank you, Mr. Chair. So just for clarification, I wanted to say thank you to the Minister, I understand that contract dollars are being represented in these interim estimates as for a full year, which is fine and dandy. I'm just curious if that contract amount for fire suppression, such as aviation contracts,

has increased for this year compared to the last? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Go to Mr. Courtoreille.

MR. TERENCE COURTOREILLE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There's no increase anticipated in the contract value that's being proposed in the interim estimates, but I can confirm that the full value of the contract is being reflected here for consideration. Thank you, sir.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Going back to the Member of Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's okay.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Is there any other Members? Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll just be brief. I think the -- if I understood the Member correctly, I think she was curious if it included the forced growth cost reflective of certain contracts, and I think that's ultimately the question that was being asked. And then I have a clearer -- a separate followup. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. We'll go to the Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So no, Mr. Chair, at this point there's no increases to the contracts amounts. These are amounts that are based on 2023-2024. Any changes that would be potentially made, whether through forced growth initiatives or otherwise, would be reflected in the full main estimates which would be tabling in May/June.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Member of Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The further qualification to the overall thing is this is a 90-day estimate or interim estimate, and maybe for the public's sense and on the record, that is -- and we'll just say by way of example, the Assembly doesn't support the contract or initiative called the Widget. I'm not going to pick on anyone in particular because we don't want anyone to get the wrong message here. So if the Assembly chose to support the Widget initiative that had currently being the 90-day proposal but we decide to vote against it, delete it in the -- at the -- let's say the advancement of the mains in May/June, what would happen in that particular case just so the public understands that we're passing an interim but if there's further reflection on business moving forward. Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, any -- I think this actually often does come up in asking why we can't do multi-year contracts or multi-year funding agreements. Every appropriation is a year over year appropriation for the government. So in other words, we get the ability to spend public dollars only based on one year at a time approved here by the Legislative Assembly. So when we come forward in May/June, if the Legislative Assembly decides not to approve something that in this interim period we had proceeded with based on past activities or past practice, then those contribution agreements usually include or have to include a line that says, you know, subject to the approval of the House. So it can at that time, you know, again, we now have the ability to enter these contracts but it's always subject to the approval of the House.

So if Members of the House were to decide that they wanted something removed, it is still -- it is still possible that that provision can be enacted to say that something wouldn't come forward. I, to be honest, though, I will also serve a bit of assurance to the public and to the partners that we have that does rarely happen. Generally, contracts and contribution agreements are with providers of services out in the public and it's not usually where I've seen that occur but, again, it certainly is -- it's at the will of this House, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you, Minister. Member of Yellowknife Centre. No further questions? Any further Members that want to -- don't see anybody. Okay, I'm going to continue on. Summary of interim estimates, item 3, Environment and Climate Change, appropriation authority required, \$57,282,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Committee, we will continue with the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs. And are there any questions? Don't see any. I'll continue on.

Summary of interim estimates, item 4, Executive and Indigenous Affairs, appropriation authority required, \$6,715,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Committee, we'll continue with the Department of Finance. Turning to page 3. Are there any questions? Don't see any hands up.

Summary of interim estimates, item 5, Finance, appropriation authority required, \$97,645,000. Does the committee agree? Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Committee, we will continue with the Department of Health and Social Services. Any questions? Thank you. I'll go to the Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I know that the purpose of this interim budget is to keep the lights on, keep core operations going. And in terms of health and social services, some of our essential services that we provide to our vulnerable populations, some of them we provide directly through the department of HSS, such as our day shelter here in town, and those operations will continue. And as we've seen it's much more expensive to run it in-house so instead we often contract out some of these essential services to non-profits and agencies.

So one example of this is the Yellowknife Women's Society currently runs the Spruce Bough transitional housing facility with harm reduction programs, and the women's society was recently informed that the current funding that they're receiving just for operations, to keep the lights on so to speak, was actual -- is actually ending March 31st. And I know that it was -- it's ending because it was obtained through a federal funding that was COVID related and that's coming to an end; however, this facility, which provides essential services to a vulnerable population, is in danger of not being able to keep the lights on as of March 31st. And so I'm wondering first if the Department of Finance, or others, have been able to find at least some interim funding past March 31st to help keep the lights on in this facility or if it would be possible to add a little bit of money into the interim estimates to, again, keep the lights on at the Spruce Bough? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you for your question. I'll go to Minister Wawzonek.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, that -- I mean I have, you know, good news and bad news. The good news is departments will now have their funding as of April 1st for at least a portion of the year to go about their business. And certainly to the extent that a department may find that it is -- that's providing a program or a service that they can't otherwise contract out or can't otherwise, you know, see another path forward on, they may well be able to find that funding. They will now have funding as of April 1st.

Without the interim estimates, they don't have an appropriation as of April 1st. So that's the good news. The longer term, though, in terms of what this funding might look like or, you know, going forward what the structure or the services, who should be providing, should it be contract, all of those decisions, those are longer conversations and bigger decisions, part of business planning for the departments between housing and social -- housing and health and social services and, indeed, to the extent that there may be an initiative that gets brought forward again, that too would fall under the work that will happen now that we have priorities and can move forward to having a mandate.

So that's a fairly long question. I apologize, Mr. Chair but, again, interim estimates aren't meant to necessarily be around, you know, a new initiative or extending of an initiative but really are sort of a keeping lights on. But keeping the lights on, again, does include providing those core services and operations, whether it's under housing or health and social services. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you, Minister Wawzonek. I'm going to the Member of Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Yeah, and I understand this may not be able to be resolved today, but I think it speaks to sort of a dilemma we have that, you know, this is -- this is not a new initiative or like a temporary initiative. It's at the moment keeping 26 people housed that otherwise would be on the street and -- yeah, I guess I'll leave that for now but just wanting to put out that in the future I think we need to reconsider how we fund services like this, that I think we would all agree are essential and sometimes we do in-house and sometimes contract out but very much take for granted that there are volunteers and non-profits in our communities who will sort of hold that safety net.

I did have one more question about health and social services and the interim budget. I'm wondering if to adjust the anticipated high demand for health services and as we know we have ever rising costs as we rely on agency nurses and locum doctors as we were just talking about, I'm wondering if further contingency is required for the Department of Health and Social Services around compensation and benefits to ensure that we will have appropriate staffing just over the interim for the next few months.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I'll take it as general comments. And I am going to continue on. Any further comments from Members? I don't see any.

I'm going to -- committee, we will return to the summary of interim estimates, item 5, Finance, for official Hansard records, the appropriation authority required, \$95,645,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Summary of interim estimates, item 6, Health and Social Services, appropriation authority required, \$201,071,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Committee, we'll continue with the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment. Are there any questions? Okay, thank you. No hands are up.

Summary of interim estimates, item 7, Industry, Tourism and Investment, appropriation authority required, \$24,073,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Committee, we will continue with the Department of Infrastructure. Is there any questions? No hands up, I don't see. We'll continue on.

Summary of interim estimates, item 8, Infrastructure, appropriation authority required, \$110,446,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. We will continue with the Department of Justice. Turning to page 4, is there any questions? Don't see any hands up. Thank you.

Summary of interim estimates, item 9, Justice, appropriation authority required, \$56,259,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Committee, we will continue with the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs. Is there any questions? No questions, I'll continue on.

Summary of interim estimates, item 10, Municipal and Community Affairs, appropriation authority required, \$97,313,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Now we will move on to the operation

expenditure total appropriation authority required, \$782,345,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you, committee. Now moving on to page 5, schedule 2, borrowing. Borrowing plan for the government reporting entity and established borrowing limits for the Government of the Northwest Territories. Total government borrowing established limits per 2024-2025, Appropriation Act, \$1,315,826,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Does the committee agree that concludes the consideration of Tabled Document 13-20(1), Interim Estimates (Operations Expenditures) April 1 to June 30, 2024?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Members, will say agreed, okay. Thank you. Now I'll pass this on to the Member from Boot Lake, Mr. Rodgers.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I move that consideration of Tabled Document 13-20(1), Interim Estimates (Operations Expenditures), April 1st to June 30th, 2024, be now concluded and that Tabled Document 13-20(1) be reported and recommended as ready for further consideration in formal session through the form of an appropriation bill. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. The motion is in order. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Question has been called. All those in favour, hands up. All those opposed, hands up. The motion is carried. Tabled Document 13-20(1) will be reported as ready for consideration in the formal session through the form of an appropriation bill.

---Carried

And I'm going to take this time to thank Minister Wawzonek, Mr. Courtoreille, and Mr. McKay for being here today. Mahsi.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move the chair rise and report progress.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Okay, thank you. There's a motion on the floor to report progress. The motion is in order and

non-debatable. All in favour -- all those in favour? All those opposed? Motion carried. I will now rise and report progress.

---Carried

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. May I have the report of the Committee of the Whole. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The committee has been considering Tabled Document 13-20(1), Interim Estimates (Operations Expenditures), and that consideration of Tabled Document 13-20(1) is concluded and that the House concur and those estimates as amended and that an appropriation bill to be based therein and introduced without delay. And, Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member. Do I have a seconder? Member for Boot Lake. The motion is in order and non-debatable. All those in favour? All those opposed? Abstentions? Motion has been carried, and the report of Committee of the Whole has been concurred with.

---carried

Report of Committee of the Whole. Third reading of bills. Orders of the day, Mr. Clerk.

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Wednesday, February 21st, 2024, 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
 - Oral Question 62-20(1): Consultation with Members of the Legislative Assembly on Policies and Strategies
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Acknowledgements
7. Oral Questions
8. Written Questions

9. Returns to Written Questions
10. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
11. Petitions
12. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
13. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
14. Tabling of Documents
15. Notices of Motion
16. Motions
17. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
18. First Reading of Bills
19. Second Reading of Bills
20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Minister's Statement 4-20(1): 2023 Wildfire Season Review and Planning for the 2024 Season
 - Minister's Statement 5-20(1): Emergency Management Preparation
 - Tabled Document 28-20(1): Supplementary Estimates (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 3, 2023-2024
 - Tabled Document 29-20(1): Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 4, 2023-2024
21. Report of Committee of the Whole
22. Third Reading of Bills
23. Orders of the Day

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Wednesday, February 21st, 2024, at 1:30 p.m. Thank you.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 4:29 p.m.

