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The Honourable Paul Delorey, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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(Tu Nedhe)

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Table of Contents

Prayer	183
Ministers' Statements	183
3-16(2): Fiscal Update (Roland).....	183
4-16(2): Apprenticeship and Occupational Certification Week (Lafferty)	184
Members' Statements	184
Strategic Literacy Investments (Bisaro)	184
Fiscal Strategy Communications and Approach (Groenewegen)	185
Housing Programs and Service Delivery Mechanisms (Krutko).....	185
Deh Cho Bridge Project (Ramsay).....	186
Transfer of the Public Housing Rental Subsidy (Beaulieu)	186
Eviction of Fort Liard Family from Public Housing (Menicoche).....	187
Additional Costs for Trucked Fuel Supplies in Inuvik (McLeod).....	187
Cost Savings from Energy Conservation Efforts (Bromley)	188
Vacant G.N.W.T. Civil Service Positions (Hawkins).....	189
Palliative Care Benefits Program (Abernethy)	189
Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery	189
Oral Questions	190
14-16(2): Additional Costs for Trucked Fuel Supplies in Inuvik (McLeod)	190
15-16(2): Transfer of Public Housing Rental Subsidy (Beaulieu).....	190
16-16(2): Deh Cho Bridge Project (Ramsay)	190
17-16(2): Strategic Literacy Investments (Bisaro).....	191
18-16(2): Fiscal Strategy Communications and Approach (Groenewegen).....	192
19-16(2): Housing Programs and Service Delivery (Krutko)	193
20-16(2): Eviction of Fort Liard Family from Public Housing (Menicoche)	194
21-16(2): Palliative Care Medication Benefits (Abernethy)	195
22-16(2): Civil Service Suggestions for Cost Savings from Energy Conservation (Bromley).....	196
23-16(2) Strategic Reductions and Cost Savings (Hawkins)	197
24-16(2) Deh Cho Bridge Project (Ramsay)	198
25-16(2) Energy Audits of G.N.W.T. Buildings (Groenewegen).....	199
Written Questions	200
2-16(2): G.N.W.T. Expenditures on Energy (Bromley).....	200
Petitions	200
Petition 1-16(2): Buffalo Problem in Fort Liard.....	200
Tabling of Documents	200
Orders of the Day	200

**Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
Thursday, February 7, 2008**

Members Present

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

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayer

Prayer.

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

Item 2, Ministers' statements. Mr. Roland.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 3-16(2)
FISCAL UPDATE

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, I would like to review the government's recent fiscal history and describe why we need to take action to bring our spending back in line with our revenues.

The fiscal situation we currently face is not new. Four years ago the 2004 budget showed that action was necessary to achieve a sustainable fiscal position. Action was taken early in the previous government. Budgets presented during the 15th Legislative Assembly were consistent in their message that the G.N.W.T.'s fiscal strategy must be sustainable. But demands on our operating expenditures continued to eat into our revenue base and erode our ability to fund badly-needed infrastructure.

Throughout the 15th Legislative Assembly the long-term structure of the Territorial Formula Financing arrangements, which are the majority of G.N.W.T. revenues, was uncertain, and the Government of the Northwest Territories was hopeful that a resource-revenue-sharing agreement was imminent. While the G.N.W.T. made some expenditure reductions, it chose not to undertake significant restructuring of spending until the longer term Territorial Formula Financing arrangements were established.

Although the 2007 budget forecast a \$44 million operating surplus for 2007-2008, it also showed that without change, the G.N.W.T. would run operating deficits for the remainder of the planning

period as expenditures outpaced revenues, and we would be almost \$300 million in debt by 2009-2010. This meant that capital investment would need to be curtailed to meet the government's fiscal responsibility policy.

We now know what our formula financing arrangements will be for the foreseeable future. New arrangements established by Canada in 2007 provide a predictable, principle-based funding source for our government. These arrangements will not change in the near future. We are not expecting additional revenues beyond those already provided for in the current arrangements.

We continue to pursue devolution and resource revenue sharing with Canada, but we must be realistic and recognize that we cannot build budgets around money we do not yet have. Despite higher amounts in previous years, the 2006-2007 federal public accounts show royalties flowing to Canada from the N.W.T. were only \$34 million. According to the proposal outlined in the last federal budget, we would have received only \$17 million in resource revenues for that year. Even in the longer term, resource revenues alone will not solve our fiscal challenges.

We are looking at limited revenue options as part of our fiscal strategy, but we know that we cannot solve our fiscal situation solely by increasing taxes on N.W.T. residents and businesses. We must live within our means.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, without action our spending will continue to grow faster than our revenues. Rather than running the operating surpluses we need to help finance our investments in badly needed infrastructure, we will be running operating deficits and borrowing to pay for our day-to-day expenses. If our expenditures grow at the rate they have over the last four years, by the end of 2011-2012 this government will be \$527 million in debt. And along the way we would have no money to invest in the new directions needed to achieve the vision and goals set by this Assembly. Later today I will table a document with information on the fiscal picture presented in recent budgets and on the fiscal responsibility policy of the G.N.W.T.

Mr. Speaker, we have already set out the planning targets to pursue a sustainable fiscal strategy for the Northwest Territories. We have not set out to simply reduce our spending; we have set out to find different ways of doing business and delivering programs and services more effectively so we can reinvest in the priority areas identified by this Assembly.

I look forward to working with Members to ensure our priorities are met. Quyanini.

Mr. Speaker: Before I go on, I'd like to draw your attention in the public gallery to the presence of Ms. Lena Pedersen, former Member of this House and first elected female Member.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 4-16(2) APPRENTICESHIP AND OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATION WEEK

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, this Legislative Assembly has placed a priority on building community human resource capacity with an emphasis on trades and entrepreneurial skills. February 4 through 8 is Apprenticeship and Occupational Certification Week, a time when we encourage Northerners to consider careers in trades and occupations and to celebrate the successes of apprentices and occupational workers in the Northwest Territories.

In 2006-2007 the Northwest Territories certified 15 people in designated occupations; 77 Northerners achieved journeyperson status, and 50 of these individuals achieved their red seal, inter-provincial status.

This year there has also been increasing success in pre-employment programs, such as the Warehouse Technician, Oil and Gas, Mineral Processing Operators Training, Environmental Monitor, Underground Miner and the Building Trades Helper programs. These programs are offered through Aurora College, in partnership with the Mine Training Society, Aboriginal Futures, and Northern industry. These programs are an important first step in drawing Northerners into careers in trades and occupations.

Throughout the month of February regional Education, Culture and Employment offices across the North will be hosting Apprenticeship and Occupational Certification Award ceremonies. Altogether 41 awards of excellence will be presented to the candidates who have shown a commitment to excellence during training in their respective trade or occupation.

With the demand for skilled workers growing across the Territories, we recognize that employers, our partners in industry, schools and Aurora College are key to the development of these workers. Without our partners' participation, delivering trades

and occupational certification programs would not be possible. I would like to extend my thanks to all of our partners who gave their time and energy for training apprentices across the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members to join me in extending congratulations to all of the many new certified trades people and their employers as well as to those who are continuing their training.

Mahsi cho.

Mr. Speaker: Item 3, Members' statements. Ms. Bisaro.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON STRATEGIC LITERACY INVESTMENTS

Ms. Bisaro: Mr. Speaker, January 27, 2008, was Family Literacy Day, and I hope that all Members read with or to a loved one on that day.

The N.W.T. Literacy Council is a non-profit, registered charitable organization and has been promoting and advancing literacy development in all N.W.T. official languages for many years. They do this through training, research and the delivery of programs.

Forty-two per cent of N.W.T. adults function at a literacy level that is lower than that considered necessary for full participation in family, community and work life. That's almost half of our population, Mr. Speaker. Survey results also show an unacceptable gap in literacy levels between aboriginal and non-aboriginal adults.

Improved literacy can positively affect our residents in many areas. It will increase economic success to reduce public spending on health and other support systems, and it will help to preserve culture. A 1 per cent rise in literacy scores creates a 2.5 per cent increase in an individual's productivity level. Increased productivity leads to economic growth, and that benefits society as a whole.

During our strategic planning sessions in November last, Members often spoke of community and family and the need for community to build from the bottom up. One of the ways we can do that is by improving literacy and numeracy skills, especially in our youth and unemployed. Residents with an acceptable level of literacy skills lead more productive lives. They feel better in terms of both work and play. Their family relationships are more stable, and they contribute more to the community. All of this serves to benefit and increase community productivity and growth.

The N.W.T. Literacy Council works on behalf of N.W.T. residents but with limited funds, a portion of

which come from the Government of the Northwest Territories. Suffice to say that the government gets very good value for the few dollars that the Literacy Council gets.

As this Assembly strives to advance the goals and priorities set last year, I hope that the government will recognize the importance of this organization and the good work they do, and that it will support the N.W.T. Literacy Council with adequate and consistent long-term funding. Our residents, our communities, our economy will be much better off for it.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. Before I go on, I'd like to draw Members' attention to the gallery and the presence of the Chief of the Tlicho community of Behchoko and former Member of the 14th Legislative Assembly: Mr. Leon Lafferty is in the gallery.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON FISCAL STRATEGY COMMUNICATIONS AND APPROACH

Mrs. Groenewegen: Mr. Speaker, again I listened to the media this morning, and I heard reference to the slashing of government spending. I want to attempt to bring my own description of what is going on to the public from a Member's perspective.

Members were elected to the 16th Assembly. As with all Assemblies I've been a part of, our first task was to get together and talk about our priorities and things that we would like to see accomplished during our term in office. It's the perfect time to do that, after we've just been through campaigns where we heard from a lot of people. We called those strategic priorities.

Then comes the task of determining if those priorities are being met by the current programs and services undertaken by government. Running parallel to that exercise is the growth of government spending exceeding increases on the revenue side of the page. Whether the 16th Assembly has any priorities or even if we retain the status quo of government, the growth occurring is not sustainable. The question, then, is: how do we control that growth in spending while at the same time ensuring that our limited but substantial resources are going toward programs and services that are going to benefit Northerners the most and bring the most positive results?

To that end, MLAs, the cabinet and senior management of government all have a role to play. Do the projects and programs on the books reflect the current priorities of the people that we represent? All of this in an environment which is not static. For the fluid review of expenditures all within our fiscal realities, in a perfect world that might require more than a four-year mandate, and we

could embark on things like a department-by-department review process. But we only have a four-year mandate in which we would like to make a difference and not leave the government broke or at our debt limit.

If we know we have to reduce our spending by a certain amount, what is the best way to achieve that? Obviously, not by setting arbitrary targets based on each department's share of the overall budget. If I were the Premier, in the interest of fiscal responsibility, I would attempt to engage everyone in a dialogue to identify areas of waste, limited results and low priority. The old style of across-the-board reductions is too dangerous. Changes need to be made, but those changes need to be carefully analyzed, and that takes time.

I'm not happy about the way our intentions have been communicated. This is a process in which we need buy-in from the public. I don't believe people in the public service would find fault with a process which made government spending more effective, efficient and targeted.

I would like to seek to unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

Mr. Speaker: The Member is seeking unanimous consent to conclude her statement.

Unanimous consent granted.

Mrs. Groenewegen: In conclusion, we didn't get out ahead of the process in our messaging, and the targets, although intended to be very tentative, have created a backlash. Everyone elected here to this Assembly came here to represent the interests of their constituents and the Territory in the very best way possible. I don't blame the media for misunderstanding our intentions, because it's our job to communicate, not to blame others for coming up with their own interpretations when we fail to do so.

I want to spend the money we have wisely, I want to make new investments where we can, and I don't want the government to waste money. I encourage anyone who has an idea about where the government can save money, and spend it better in different ways, to e-mail your MLA today and tell us what you think.

I also encourage the public service to partner with us in this exercise. You probably have some of the best ideas, because you work in the government every day.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON HOUSING PROGRAMS AND SERVICE DELIVERY MECHANISMS

Mr. Krutko: My statement today is dealing with the new housing rollout, the new housing program that

was implemented in regard to CARE, HELP, PATH and STEP. I think it's important to realize that it is a rollout. A lot of members in my constituency have raised concerns in regard to accessing these programs and services and also being informed on what the status of their applications is.

I think it's important that we ensure that we do have ongoing dialogue with our constituents, homeowners and people applying for programs. But more importantly, I think there's a time for us to consider looking at implementing a program that allows communities to deliver these programs and services within their communities and through the regional centres. I know an effort was made in the previous government by implementing community liaison officer positions to assist in explaining programs and services, to help with maintenance of programs. But again, even the elders fall through the cracks when it comes to assisting them with the maintenance program to ensure that they can continue to remain in their homes.

I for one feel that this government has to have a reporting mechanism — either publicly, through the newspapers, or even through this House — on where the programs and services we deliver are, what the income of those programs is, what the status is of these programs, but more importantly, who is accessing these programs.

At the appropriate time I will be asking the Minister Responsible for the Housing Corporation, who is responsible for this, exactly what they are doing to not only educate the public but to also make this program more publicly sound and ensure the public is involved in the layout of this program and also able to access these programs.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON DEH CHO BRIDGE PROJECT

Mr. Ramsay: I want to speak today about access to information on the Deh Cho Bridge project. I would like to thank the Minister of Transportation's office, which recently advised me that the cost-benefit analysis of the project is actually posted on the Department of Transportation's web site. Someone should tell the Premier, who also happens to be the Finance Minister, where that's at so he can have a look at it.

The document itself looks like it was co-written by the departmental staff, who have injected every possible benefit into its conclusion. Is this the detailed, up-to-date analysis that the Minister and the Premier have told Members about? Certainly, at \$160 million, this project would and does deserve much, much more detailed analysis than what's included on that web site.

Now on to the concession agreement, which is the master agreement signed between the Deh Cho

Bridge Corporation and the G.N.W.T., which arranges for the development, the design, the construction, the operation, maintenance and management of the bridge. This agreement was signed by the last government three days before the election, committing the G.N.W.T. to the project. I've asked for a copy of this agreement numerous times, because I want to see exactly what we're committing ourselves to, what we have negotiated in the agreement and where our potential liability may rest.

I believe the Members of this Legislative Assembly have every right to see this document. Why is the government so reluctant to provide Members with a copy of the agreement? Is there something in there that they just don't want us to see?

Mr. Speaker, one option I will be entertaining is looking into getting this Assembly to subpoena the document so that we can see exactly what we are committing ourselves and every government for the next 35 years to. The former Premier promised Members that we would be given the information about the concession agreement prior to the government signing it. Obviously, that did not happen, and this government seems intent on charting the same course of secrecy on the agreement. The Deh Cho Bridge Corporation, which the last government signed the agreement with, was to have deemed equity of \$5 million. I'm still not certain how any government could sign into an agreement with a corporation by just deeming them equity. I wish someone would deem me \$5 million in equity, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I'd like to seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

Mr. Speaker: The Member is seeking unanimous consent to conclude his statement.

Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deh Cho Bridge Corporation still, as I mentioned yesterday in my statement, does not have \$5 million in equity. And things have changed now in the make-up of the equity stake in the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation. I want to ensure that our legal experts are going over these agreements with a fine-tooth comb to ensure that our liability is minimized. At the appropriate time today I will have questions again for the Premier. Mahsi.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON TRANSFER OF THE PUBLIC HOUSING RENTAL SUBSIDY

Mr. Beaulieu: I'd like to talk about the issue that many of my constituencies as well as many others across the N.W.T. are facing today: the issue of the

public housing rental subsidy transfer to Education, Culture and Employment.

Since the time of the transfer of the public housing rental subsidy in April of 2006 from the N.W.T. Housing Corporation to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, local organizations have been experiencing operational problems and the tenants have been getting more and more frustrated.

For example, Mr. Speaker, Income Security has not been getting the tenants' rental subsidy assessments done in time for an accurate assessment of the tenants' rent. Many tenants do not know their rent until long after the first of the month. Most of these tenants are already surviving on a tight budget, and the last thing they need is to fall behind in their rent. This results in more tenants failing to pay their rent, with no way of catching up. This forces the local organizations to file termination orders against the tenants. Applications by local housing organizations to the rental office have increased, in some cases, ten times more when compared to the old system.

It is not sufficient for Income Security to say rent is economic rent. If the tenants do not report this income, Income Security should ensure the tenants do report this income by working with them, considering that public housing is usually a last resort for accommodation in many of our small communities.

Under the new system both the tenants and the LHOs are clearly frustrated with the quality of service provided by Income Security. As an example of this frustration, in one LHO alone, tenants' rent accounts receivables have increased from \$18,000 to \$185,000 in one fiscal year.

The LHOs were created to operate at a community level for direct personal contact with tenants for all their housing needs. The new system has taken this full and effective service out of the public housing system and moved it into a system that has caused nothing but confusion, frustration and stress for both the local housing organizations and the tenants.

The new system is not working, plain and simple. With cutbacks and responsible governance being a priority of this new government, we cannot afford to let this problem drag on any further.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON EVICTION OF FORT LIARD FAMILY FROM PUBLIC HOUSING

Mr. Menicoche: [English translation not provided.]

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you've seen the media reports of the eviction of a family from public housing last month at Fort Liard. A family of five

was evicted from public housing during one of the coldest months of the year for falling behind in their rent. I am sure you're thinking, Mr. Speaker, that the family must have owed a lot of rent money for such drastic action to be taken. But sadly, this family was evicted from their house for owing just over \$1,000.

What has happened to the family? Thankfully, their respective families have stepped up and provided a place to stay for the short term. However, nobody had the space for the family to stay together, so our policies have split up this family and inconvenienced two other families, and subjected the children to teasing by their peers at school — pretty dire consequences for \$1,000.

And to really make sure that this family will not be able to get on their feet any time soon, the costs for the rental officer and the Sheriff's office related to this eviction have been added to their existing bill, and they now owe well over \$2,500.

One simple thing that is getting lost in evicting people from public housing is that one way or another, the G.N.W.T. is going to incur costs, through increased social assistance payments for the families to rent a place on the open market, or for downstream costs related to the upkeep of the families. This leaves a bitter taste in my mouth, like wasabi sauce.

I know that we need rules. I know that people living in public housing are expected to pay their fair share for their housing. But as an MLA, I also know that I expect the delivery or withholding of government programs and services to be based on common sense. Just shuffling families between income assistance programs doesn't address the core issues and doesn't save the government any money at the end of the day. Mahsi cho.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ADDITIONAL COSTS FOR TRUCKED FUEL SUPPLIES IN INUVIK

Mr. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I spoke on the rate increase in the NWTPC and the strain it was causing to the residents of Inuvik. I'd like to speak to another subject today that's also causing some strain to the residents of Inuvik.

We had a meeting earlier this year, and we were informed that our supply of fuel didn't make it into the community and that fuel was going to have to be trucked in. This happened a couple of times before, but what we were told at the meeting was that the cost was going to be passed on to the consumers, the residents of Inuvik, and that's where I have an issue. We heard, "It was their fault, their fault." They're pointing fingers back and forth. The bottom line is, I don't care whose fault it is. What I care about is the costs being passed on to

the people that we represent, and that's what my main concern is in this whole thing.

The attitude of one of the two people who were blaming each other is, "If they don't like it, they don't have to live there." We've lived there all our lives, and we're not going to move out of there because the price of fuel went up. That's a rotten attitude to have.

What I care about are the seniors that pay their own fuel that are hit with an additional cost. I have an example here, where the cost of fuel for one senior paying his own fuel went up 30 per cent in one year. That's in addition to the 15 per cent I talked about yesterday.

I said yesterday, Mr. Speaker, they're trying to price us out of the N.W.T., but it's not going to happen. And I really don't care whose fault it is. I want these outfits to resolve their issues amongst themselves and not pass the extra cost increase on to the consumer, Mr. Speaker. Again, we had nothing to do with it, yet we're the ones who are having to pay the extra costs of trucking all this fuel in Inuvik over the Dempster Highway. I hope they have a safe trip up.

Mr. Speaker, you know, the senior who has to pay his own fuel.... It's a burden on them, and this is a burden on the government. We have an obligation, Mr. Speaker. Even though this is all private enterprise, I believe this government has an obligation to protect the residents in Northwest Territories from situations like this. I've always been a big supporter of the pipeline, Mr. Speaker. But more and more I see the attitude of some of the proponents. I'm starting to wonder if that's the right attitude to have.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON COST SAVINGS FROM ENERGY CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, our Premier and Minister of Finance has indicated that as a government, our rate of spending is increasing faster than our rate of revenue intake. Clearly, a remedy is needed. We can make cuts, and we must find ways to increase our revenues. But, Mr. Speaker, I would like to suggest there is a third way.

All Members of this Assembly and, indeed, all people who pay bills, have seen a steep and rising increase in the cost of energy, particularly fossil fuels such as fuel oil, diesel and propane. In those communities where electricity generation depends on diesel generators, there has been a parallel increase in the cost of electricity, as clearly highlighted yesterday by my colleagues Mr. Krutko, Mr. McLeod and Mr. Menicoche.

Mr. Speaker, this government has significant infrastructure and numbers of staff in every community of the Northwest Territories. I see this as an opportunity to make progress on several fronts. As possibly the largest single non-human cost this government faces, energy costs provide an opportunity for major savings. Organizations large and small have proven that just by changing the ways we use energy, savings of between 10 and 30 per cent can be achieved. Families that face crippling utility bills react effectively when informed and motivated. I know individuals and institutions here in the N.W.T. who have reduced their electrical bills by greater than 20 and 30 per cent through their own awareness and action. They've done it, and we can do it too.

Besides cutting waste, reductions in energy costs will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to our efforts to mitigate climate change — one of the most urgent challenges we face. But most immediately relevant to our focus on budgets, finances and trying to do more with less, saving money otherwise spent on energy also means the chance to live within our means without suffering job loss.

We have an innovative and committed workforce of thinking people who would love the chance to show their merit. Mr. Speaker, let's use this opportunity to challenge our dedicated public service and see what we can do together. Let's ask for ideas and suggestions from our own public servants on energy savings in government activities and workplaces and, in the process, save jobs, mitigate climate change and develop our workplace morale.

Mr. Speaker, I ask permission to conclude my statement.

Mr. Speaker: The Member asks for unanimous consent.

Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, repeatedly pointing out the obvious to this government with little apparent uptake at this important early decision-making stage is frustrating. In fact, I'm amazed at some of the ongoing archaic thinking on energy and economic issues, thinking that will raise our cost of living and further damage our local economy as well as hugely benefitting the few and increasing migrant workers.

How clear do we have to make it, Mr. Speaker? Save fossil fuel, save money, promote local energy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, grow our local economies, give people meaningful work and enjoy the social benefits.

Mahsi.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
VACANT G.N.W.T.
CIVIL SERVICE POSITIONS

Mr. Hawkins: During the 15th Assembly I raised the issue of vacant or ghost positions within the public service and the fact that funding for these unstaffed positions is included in departments' budgets. I recognize that many of these vacancies are short-term, but in some instances these positions are left unfilled for long periods of time, and the funding is then used at the discretion of the department. Sometimes that money evaporates into the abyss.

I have two concerns today about these unfilled positions that I wish to highlight. My first one is accountability. Members review and approve the departmental budget with the understanding that the money will be spent according to the budget information provided. I am concerned that these funds may be spent without approval from Members of this House.

My second concern is that at this time, when we are facing serious spending reductions, it is paramount we maximize our resources. Examining the funded but yet unfilled positions needs to be reviewed, and that could go a long way to mitigate some of the effects. So we must look for inefficiencies to avoid any serious ripple effect. We need to be selective when picking from the blueberry patch, Mr. Speaker.

Our government has spent, in past years, like we are living in a dream of gluttony. We must be prepared for and careful about what pound of flesh we demand out of our public service or out of our system in general. I support the course correction, but I do not want a flashback of the Todd days in the '90s. Mr. Speaker, I say to the Premier, heed my warning and engage Regular Members. Again I say heed my warning; engage Regular Members early or prepare your few coins for the ferryman, as he is starting to dock for you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
PALLIATIVE CARE BENEFITS PROGRAM

Mr. Abernethy: It has recently come to my attention that the G.N.W.T. does not offer a palliative care benefits program for Northern residents who have been declared or diagnosed palliative by their physician. Palliative patients are those patients who have reached the end stages of a life-threatening disease or illness and require a variety of medications in order to maintain their comfort, and control pain during the last stages of their illness.

Currently, Northern residents who have been diagnosed as palliative may be covered through the

G.N.W.T.'s Extended Health Benefits Program. This is a good program and provides coverage for Northern residents for a wide variety of conditions, including palliative care patients.

Unfortunately, it is limited when it comes to palliative patients. Many of the medications palliative patients require for management of pain are not automatically benefits under the Extended Benefits program. These required medications can be added as a benefit for patients; however, the application process can be quite long. The net result is that palliative patients will either have to go without comfort management prescriptions until they receive approval from the Extended Health Benefits Program, or pay out of their own pockets until they can be reimbursed once their Extended Health application for the prescribed medication is approved.

This seems unreasonable. Palliative patients should not have to wait for the care that will allow them to live their remaining days in comfort and as they choose. Most southern jurisdictions already have the palliative care benefits programs which are expedited in order to reduce wait times for palliative patients. For example, Albertans are guaranteed a 16–24-hour turn-around time for approval, and they often provide them immediately.

Residents of the N.W.T. who have been diagnosed as palliative deserve more than the wait times they currently face. As a government we need to ensure that no additional barriers are placed on the care and comfort and pain management of these individuals during their last days. We need a palliative care benefits program.

Mr. Speaker, later this afternoon I'll be asking the Minister Responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services questions concerning palliative care benefits programs for residents of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker: Item 4, reports of standing and special committees. Item 5, returns to oral questions. Item 6, recognition of visitors in the gallery. Mr. Lafferty.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, I too would like to recognize Chief Leon Lafferty of Behchoko, who is here with us in the gallery. Mahsi.

Mr. Abernethy: I would like to recognize Lena Pedersen as well. She's a resident of the Great Slave riding.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. Thank you to the visitors in the gallery.

Item 7, acknowledgements. Item 8, oral questions.
Mr. McLeod.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 14-16(2) ADDITIONAL COSTS FOR TRUCKED FUEL SUPPLIES IN INUVIK

Mr. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I also failed to mention before that I feel for the local agent in Inuvik, who is the first point of contact for a lot of people. He has to bring this extra cost to the consumer even though it's out of his hands, too. I felt I needed to mention that.

I'd like to direct my line of questioning today to the Premier. I'd like to ask the Premier if there's anything that this government can do to prevent the residents of Inuvik being burdened with the extra cost of trucking the fuel up.

Hon. Floyd Roland: The mandate we have as the Government of the Northwest Territories, when it comes to fuel supply, is to stay out of the private-market sector. In this particular case we did sit down and try to gather information as to what was happening and worked with the community in trying to get as much information as possible.

Mr. McLeod: I understand and I respect the fact that we try to stay out of the private market. However, we still have an obligation to the residents of Inuvik who are being faced with this extra cost.

I'd like to ask the Premier if he would communicate with Esso and NTCL the need to resolve this issue without passing the extra costs on to the consumers of Inuvik. As I said before, it was pointing fingers back and forth, and that's not my concern right now. My concern is protecting the residents of Inuvik. So would he communicate to these two companies the need to get this resolved without passing the extra costs on to the residents of Inuvik?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, we have gotten involved at the government level through our petroleum products, especially in Public Works and Services, which deals with fuel in communities that do not have a private-sector market. We've contacted them and raised concerns. The first piece is to ensure that the community had enough fuel supply for community needs, and we were informed that would be the case. When it comes to the marketing side and price structuring, they've not been prepared to have a discussion with us on that basis.

QUESTION 15-16(2) TRANSFER OF PUBLIC HOUSING RENTAL SUBSIDY

Mr. Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, earlier today I spoke about the problems in local housing organizations that public-housing tenants are experiencing since the transfer of the public housing rent subsidy from the N.W.T. Housing Corporation to Education, Culture and Employment. Although there is more than one department involved here, the main issue is the role of Income Security. However, I will be addressing my questions to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

Mr. Speaker, has the Minister completed a comprehensive review of the transfer of the public housing subsidy program from the N.W.T. Housing Corporation to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Member for asking that question. It has been an ongoing discussion for the last couple of years now. Yes, we have done a formal review of the program itself with the involvement of the N.W.T. Housing Corporation.

There are various components to the review. It's a large project that we are undertaking, first with the complication with various parties — complications with our department and the N.W.T. Housing Corporation and also LHO frontline staff. We are proceeding with presenting the information package to the Social Programs Committee members within the next few days. Mahsi.

Mr. Beaulieu: Can the Minister provide the cost of the transfer from the N.W.T. Housing Corporation to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, including new positions, when the report is given to the Social Programs Committee?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: On April 1 of 2006, we transferred the corporation to ECE, Education, Culture and Employment. At that time the dollar figure was \$30 million to subsidize those programs, and out of that, we did receive an additional \$1.3 million to administer the program. Out of that, 10.75 positions were transferred. Of that 10.75, three were placed in headquarters, and the remaining 7.5 were all located as client service officers throughout the Northwest Territories region. Mahsi.

QUESTION 16-16(2) DEH CHO BRIDGE PROJECT

Mr. Ramsay: Yesterday I was asking some questions in regard to the Deh Cho Bridge project and information about that project, and I wanted to continue on that line of questioning.

The first question I have.... Again, I alluded to the fact that there is a cost-benefit analysis now located on the Department of Transportation's web site. I'm wondering if the Premier is aware of that, and whether in fact he is satisfied that the information contained in that cost-benefit analysis is worthy of the project going forward.

Hon. Floyd Roland: We were gathering all the information together to provide to committee, as committee had requested. I'm aware that Transportation had just recently posted that one report, and it is the second piece of that report. There was an additional report done when the project was first looked at, and that one is now out and will be part of the package I bring the Members.

As for the value of that report, it does show that there is still a benefit, though reduced as a result of the increased cost of that project.

Mr. Ramsay: Another question would be whether anybody on the other side of the House has actually read the cost-benefit analysis. I'd like to know that. The reason I'd like to know that is because in there it says that in 2003 we had a positive benefit on the bridge project of \$39 million, and in 2007 that went to minus \$50 million.

Hon. Floyd Roland: The Member is quoting from one piece of it. There are a number of categories that are highlighted in there. When you look at the actual community percentages, as I've stated, there is still a benefit in a number of factors. There is less of a benefit there from the first report to this one.

As the Member stated, it's out there publicly. I would encourage people who are interested in this project to have a full read of that, and not just refer to the specific clips some Members like to use.

Mr. Ramsay: I think the Premier might be referring to the part of the cost-benefit analysis that, it would appear, the Department of Transportation wrote themselves, in terms of the benefits. Again, I'd like to ask the Premier: what was the basis for his government proceeding with the project? On what did they base their decision to move forward on the project?

Hon. Floyd Roland: We've inherited that project. The Member is asking what was the basis of the 16th Legislative Assembly. The fact is that this project was established, the fiscal parameters were identified, and as a government we were in the position that as long as conditions of the concession agreement were met, it would be proceeding.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Ramsay: We're in an exercise now where we're looking at reducing spending by \$135 million

over two years, and we have signed on to a project that's going to benefit us a net negative result of minus \$50 million. I'm wondering again why this government would pick up where the last government left off and follow through on this project when it's going to have a negative impact on the net fiscal reality here in the Northwest Territories.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, again I would encourage members of the public and those who are interested in this to read the full report as to the cost-benefit analysis. There are sections where, yes, that was reduced because of the increased cost of the project. But there is still a somewhat reduced area of benefit — but still a benefit — to a couple of the communities in the Northwest Territories, which provide for half the population of the Northwest Territories.

QUESTION 17-16(2) STRATEGIC LITERACY INVESTMENTS

Ms. Bisaro: My question is for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

As I mentioned in my Member's statement, the N.W.T. Literacy Council works diligently to advance literacy and numeracy skills for N.W.T. residents, and in so doing is contributing to our overall economic and community growth. Can the Minister advise if the advancement of literacy and numeracy skills is a priority for his department?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, the literacy programs and projects in the community are an important factor for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. We do continue to support these programs and organizations to make them a real success in our small communities and throughout the Northwest Territories. So, yes, we are supportive of these programs.

Ms. Bisaro: I'm very glad to hear the department is supportive of literacy and numeracy and advancing those skills. I thought I heard the Minister say there was funding support in there. Can the Minister confirm that funding for the N.W.T. Literacy Council will be multi-year funding indexed to inflation?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, we do provide funding to the N.W.T. Literacy Council on an annual basis. Last year we contributed \$480,000, and this year we will continue funding that organization, because we certainly want to see some enhancement in the community. The department would like to see some positive results out of the community with respect to the community-based literacy programs. We will continue to support that initiative. Mahsi.

Mr. Bisaro: I don't believe I heard the words "long-term" or "multi-year" in there. I wonder if the Minister could clarify, please.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, we do provide on an annual basis, based on the application process that comes in. The N.W.T. Literacy Council is part of the budget planning process. It will be considered part of business planning. We've highlighted the importance of having them as part of the program and the organizations that deliver these important literacy programs in the communities. Mahsi.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Ms. Bisaro.

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I wonder if the Minister will commit to emphasizing the importance of literacy for the federal government and lobby for continuing federal dollars to support the advancement of literacy in the N.W.T., to enhance the dollars that the N.W.T. puts forward.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, it is important to stress the continued negotiation with the federal government. They have been part of the process as well, and we will continue to negotiate with our federal counterparts. This will certainly be brought up at future FPT meetings nationally, and certainly it will be addressed. Mahsi.

QUESTION 18-16(2)
FISCAL STRATEGY
COMMUNICATIONS AND APPROACH

Mrs. Groenewegen: Mr. Speaker, in follow-up to my Member's statement, I have some questions for the Premier, just so the public, and maybe even the public service, understands exactly what is afoot here in our government with respect to the infamous \$135 million reduction. The reduction, I think, is intended to take place over two years. But in terms of the communication that went out to the departments.... And, as I said in my Member's statement, I am not really in favour of across-the-board proportional reductions. I don't think that it is very strategic. We want to talk about strategic investments; I want to talk about strategic reductions.

I'd like to ask the Premier if he could characterize the nature of the communication that went to the departments. Was it that this was intended for a very preliminary review, that these were tentative numbers? Or has the work already commenced, decisions put into actions?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, the area of the reduction targets that we've made public, as the Members have highlighted.... The message has gone out to the public about the overall target amounts. As we sent the message back to departments, there was consideration that had to be given. They were looking at reallocations and

some net reductions as well. That was to be worked on in conjunction with the 16th Assembly's vision and goals and our key priorities.

The message that went down as a starting point from departments was.... We looked at overall expenditures, department by department, and the larger their budget, they got a portion of a target. And we would review that — the information got back — and make decisions as we proceeded. But there were also conditions on that, and that was, again, that they should not be conflicting with the strategic initiatives that we have set as the 16th Legislative Assembly. That review is being done, and decisions have not been adopted at this point.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Premier and the cabinet would not want initiatives to come back to them that clearly conflict with the priorities set out by the 16th Assembly in our strategic planning exercise. However, let's be honest: the strategic planning document is pretty general; it's just not that specific. You could drive a truck through some of those initiatives. They are intended to be general. They are intended to convey an intent and a spirit.

I'd like to ask the Premier, then, for everybody's benefit and comfort: could you please confirm that no reductions or reinvestments will occur without the Members on this side of the House being fully consulted in advance?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, as I've laid out to committee members the process that I intend to use during the life of this government, it is to be more inclusive with Members. As we look at the information that is being presented, the first filter would be at a cabinet level to see if something had any support or should be told to get off the list and go back to departments. Once we feel that there is something that we could proceed with, we would go back to Members, sit down, get the input of Members, take that back and look at further adjustments and refinements, if there are other things that were not acceptable or there were other ideas that were not considered.

I think the big piece we need to recognize is that because this is over two years and we want to make a fundamental shift in how we do business, the refocus in government initiatives is going to look at the program aspect of the delivery of departments and get into that section of how we deliver programs. The first phase would be some of the caption areas where we could implement without much change, at least at the initial phase of our exercise.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Mr. Speaker, our strategic document was called *Northerners Working Together*, and I want to make sure that we've got MLAs working together.

There is fear out there in the public about what is already underway, what already is afoot. I want to stress that point today. I'll be very clear. I gave that example of the education council starting to already look for reductions, reducing costs of school operating costs and so on. I don't want there to be irretrievable, irreparable damage done because people are out there getting ahead of the game.

Let's make it clear: nothing is going to happen in terms of reductions without that information being shared with this House.

Hon. Floyd Roland: The work that we're doing is planning and targeting. We have to get that information back; we have to go to Members to see where that information is at and get input. No decisions will be made until we have some comfort, if we can even call it that, as to the direction we're heading in — what areas would be acceptable in the area of reduction and, more importantly, where we will find the dollars for reinvestment into strategic initiatives.

I should also add, as I highlighted in the sessional statement, there are a number of strategic initiatives that align with the vision and goals of the 16th Assembly that have more detail. I will be sharing that with Members within the next day or so.

Mrs. Groenewegen: I'm glad we're having this discussion here on the floor of the House today, because I want to assure members of the public that the Regular Members are willing to work long and hard hours to make sure this is done in a careful and thoughtful manner, and that the interests of the people we represent are first and foremost in our minds.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. I didn't hear a question there. I'd like to remind Members again that question periods are for questions, not for statements.

QUESTION 19-16(2)
HOUSING PROGRAMS
AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Mr. Krutko: My question is to the Minister Responsible for the Housing Corporation, Mr. Miltenberger, in regard to the new housing program initiatives that have been put out by way of CARE, HELP, PATH and also STEP.

It's important, as a government, that when we put programs out, we also keep track of their progress and, more importantly, have a reporting mechanism back to the Legislative Assembly and the people of the Northwest Territories — and more importantly, work with the clients that we are trying to assist.

One thing that I find is that there are a lot of problems in regard to communication with this

program, especially feedback to our constituents who are trying to access these programs.

I'd like to ask the Minister: is there a reporting mechanism to himself, through the MLA or back to the particular constituents, so that we can track these programs, so that people aren't waiting a year later to hear back from your department? What are you doing to improve the dialogue and cut down on timelines in responding to our constituents?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: In the 2005-2008 business plans, there was a decision made to consolidate housing programs into the programs that my colleague Mr. Krutko just mentioned.

We have been working for over a year now to implement these, and we have had, for example, the first meeting in almost living memory in the Housing Corporation of the managers and the chairs of the LHOs that came to town to sit down and talk about a number of things, one of them being the housing programs that were currently being delivered.

I will make in this House the commitment to Members and the Social Programs Committee that if there is an interest in talking about the efficiency and effectiveness of these programs and any suggestions for improvement, we're willing to look at that. As well, I will be travelling across the North to the communities to talk to people and the LHOs about the issues in their communities, specifically these programs.

We have just undertaken an important reorganization in the Housing Corporation that's going to provide better service to the regions, the districts, the LHOs and the communities, and that, hopefully, will allow for a better flow of information both ways and support to the communities.

Mr. Krutko: With regard to the dialogue and consultation, I think it's important, for the Minister, that we do use the agencies in our communities. You touched on LHOs. I know there have been community liaison positions put in place through band councils and whatnot. It's important that we also look at devolving some of these program responsibilities to the communities, rather than simply keeping them at the regional office.

Have you looked at the possibility of devolving some of these program responsibilities to communities that have the capacity to deliver those programs in the communities, rather than having them delivered through regional centres?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Yes, we have. In fact, we just concluded, early in October, the arrangement in Fort Smith with the Salt River First Nation, where they put money into a pot, as did the Housing Corporation in matching dollars, to do an increased number of home repairs. That was a

negotiated arrangement. And any community or region that has a specific suggestion that we haven't contemplated or doesn't currently exist, I am very interested in sitting down to talk to the MLA or to the community or region about what that might be and if there's a way for us do business.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Minister for that, because I think we do have to make those steps to ensure that communities and residents of those communities do take on the responsibility of housing but, more importantly, deliver locally to the residents.

Mr. Speaker, one of the areas that we seem to have a real gap with is the seniors' maintenance repair program. That is there to assist seniors to maintain their homes, to be able to keep seniors in their homes longer in regard to maintaining their furnaces and problems that they had by way of maintenance. So I'd just like to ask the Minister: is there anyone looking at how seniors are responding to this program specifically? I know previously we worked with the seniors' society to work on that particular matter. I know that it is a concern with a lot of seniors in my riding. So I'd just like to ask the Minister: have you been looking at the seniors' response to this program?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Speaker, yes, we have. The money for seniors has increased per client. But I have also heard the concerns that the new program makes it more difficult to access. I've heard that in communities; I've heard it from the Members. So we're in the process.

I reiterate the offer to sit down with committee, with MLAs. Give me your suggestions about how we can improve the programs we currently deliver. They're there to benefit the client. If they're not working — they're made by us collectively — then we should, we can and we will change them to be more effective.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, one of the biggest concerns I heard from homeowners is that programs seem to be restricting them from accessing these programs because they previously applied for a program in the past or they had a half-house at some point in their life.

So I'd like to ask the Minister: have you looked at the restrictions that have been applied to these programs in small communities where people may have had a half-house 20 years ago? They no longer have it. They became a resident of the N.W.T. Housing Corporation in social housing. And now they're trying to get back into home ownership, but that's held against them.

So I'd like to ask the Minister: can you look at the possibility of taking down some of these

restrictions? Realistically these people don't technically own a home. They might have owned it 20 years ago, but they no longer own it anymore. But yet they're being restricted from accessing these programs because of the guidelines that are being used and the way it's being interpreted. So would you consider looking at that?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Yes, we will consider looking at those. As we have our discussions with committee, if there's a specific suggestion in terms of improvements, we'd be more than happy to consider those.

QUESTION 20-16(2)
EVICTION OF FORT LIARD FAMILY
FROM PUBLIC HOUSING

Mr. Menicoche: I'd just like to follow up on my Member's statement on the housing issue in Fort Liard and then ask the Minister of Housing.... I raised, of course, this issue with him on a couple of occasions. I just want to know specifically what has been happening with this file in the last month.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Speaker, the Member raised the specifics of this particular case in the House. There's been work done with the clients as we attempt to sort out their circumstance. They had applied for public housing. And we want to work with them to try to sort out their circumstance, keeping in mind that this particular issue has some history. But we're committed to working with them to try to give them some assistance and move forward.

Mr. Menicoche: Just in general, I know that if somebody owes the housing association money, we stop helping them. But I think in this case, the government acted too quickly — or the Housing Corporation then really acted too quickly, Mr. Speaker. The clients there were making payments. They were bending over backwards to do what they could to make that payment on their account and had just about reached within striking distance of being paid off. We basically foreclosed on them and kicked them all out.

In fact, what has happened is they weren't home for an hour, and the house had been boarded up. The poor mother actually had to beg to get back into the house to get clothing for her children for school for the next day. It was a really sad situation, and I was really disappointed to hear about that. I would like to know: do we have a policy about kicking out or evicting people in the wintertime? Mahsi.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: I would just like to point out that the whole process of eviction is a fairly lengthy one. It can take up to a year or more. There are numerous steps that have to be undertaken to get to that point, and it's not something that is entered into lightly. There tend to

be circumstances all along the way where things haven't been agreed to or agreements that were agreed to haven't been followed, eventually resulting in court proceedings being taken.

In regard to evictions, the one specific clause I am aware of as a restriction for evictions is as it pertains to mobile homes.

Mr. Menicoche: I'm not too sure why the policy only restricts it to mobile homes. I think it's something that should affect all our residents in all our communities, especially in light of the 40-below weather that's been happening there recently.

I would like to direct the Housing Minister to look at that to see if the Minister can commit to some kind of review of that policy and expand it to all our residents.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: The clause I was referring to falls under the Residential Tenancies Act, under "Winter evictions" in Section 54(2), where it specifies the restrictions. But I take the intent of the Member's question. Of course, if that issue comes up in terms of the legislation and the need to have a review, we'd be committed to that process.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr. Menicoche.

Mr. Menicoche: I'm glad the Minister will have a look at that and maybe direct his department to make changes to that.

The other one is if one of our clients owes \$50, do we throw them all out? What is the limit there?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: The issue with rents in arrears is dealt with on a case-by-case basis. It depends how long, but usually it requires some significant arrears and a process where there has been an inability to collect rent.

I would just like to point out for the benefit of the House that we struggle with rental arrears. We probably have well over \$6 million in rental arrears that we're trying to collect, and it is a challenge for the LHOs and for this government. It's a burden. We speak to the issue of not only what we're doing as a Housing Corporation, but the issue of personal responsibility and how we collectively work together in this very important area.

QUESTION 21-16(2)

PALLIATIVE CARE MEDICATION BENEFITS

Mr. Abernethy: In my Member's statement today I talked about the lack of a palliative care drug benefits program in the Northwest Territories. Currently the G.N.W.T. does not have a palliative care program. Palliative patients are going through a significant amount of stress, given their condition, and the last thing they need is additional stress built

up on them as they have to deal with prescription medications and getting additional prescription medication from the pharmacy.

Our current process involves filling out an application, sending the application in. The application then goes down to Alberta Blue Cross which administers the Extended Health Benefits Program. Lots of delays; often you have to spend money up front.

My question to the Minister is: for the care and comfort of our residents who have been diagnosed as palliative, would you commit to developing, or having the Department of Health and Social Services develop, a comprehensive palliative care benefits program that has a comprehensive formula for pain management of palliative patients?

Hon. Sandy Lee: I thank the Member for the question in the first place.

Also, it's important to note there is no one under palliative care who is going without the medication they need. I think we should make that very clear. Everybody is getting the medication they need. This is an issue with the process. I think the approval for the drugs, or the medication, is taking longer than it should.

But under the existing program, if all the documents are in on time, it is possible for the return to happen within 24 hours. I have talked to my department about this, and we're in discussion with Blue Cross to make sure that we bring this to their attention so that any application being made by the physician for palliative care medication is processed within 24 hours.

Mr. Abernethy: In my research on this issue I've talked to a number of pharmacists, and it's clear to me, through discussions with them, that the majority of palliative patients are experiencing delays. They are submitting applications that have to go through the department before they get to Alberta Blue Cross. Alberta Blue Cross has a fairly quick and rapid turn-around time; there's no question — within 24 hours. It's getting it to them that's taking a long time.

We need an expedited process for palliative patients in the Northwest Territories to ensure that they do not have to go out-of-pocket. And they are going out-of-pocket. And if they can't afford to go out-of-pocket, then they go without until they've been approved by the G.N.W.T., the standard or Supplementary Health Benefits.

Once again, I'd like to ask the Minister to develop, or have the department develop, a comprehensive palliative care drug benefits program which includes a formula so that every time a medication is changed or a prescription is changed for the pain management of one of our residents who is

palliative, they don't have to resubmit another application.

Hon. Sandy Lee: We are looking into that. I think it's a difference in what we call it. I'm willing to commit to having a rapid assessment program in order to ensure that those in palliative situations who need to be taken care of have as little stress as possible. The department will work with Alberta Blue Cross to expedite that process.

What we should keep in mind, though.... There are lots of medications that people in palliative care need that are under strict control because of the nature and the scope of that medication. So we couldn't possibly do something where there were no controls at all. I totally agree with the Member that we need to do more to make the process more efficient, quicker and more compassionate. I will make the commitment to the Member to look into that.

Mr. Abernethy: Thank you to the Minister. It is important that there is a formulary that would set the parameters of which medications for pain management would be available. I think that in the reviews and in the research, and hopefully in this moving forward in the development of a palliative care benefits program, they talk with physicians and pharmacists in the N.W.T. who are dealing with these patients, who might be able to add a significant amount of valuable input.

So in your research and in your moving forward in this, I'd like the Minister's commitment that they will involve pharmacists from across the N.W.T. as well as physicians.

Hon. Sandy Lee: I've already committed to that. Everyone who needs palliative medications is getting them. We will make it as efficient as possible. There's no one going without the help they need. We will try to make that more efficient. And we are working on a rapid assessment process.

QUESTION 22-16(2)
CIVIL SERVICE SUGGESTIONS FOR COST
SAVINGS FROM ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Bromley: Our civil service is a significant, innovative resource that we need to put to work when we are faced with these fiscal challenges. We know that they have many skills beyond just what they bring to the job.

I'm wondering if the Premier has approached the civil service and asked them to identify opportunities for cost savings, and what other action he is taking in this area.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Our approach has been more the formal process that's been established through

our departments and into their organizations to see what can be identified as potential areas of savings.

Mr. Bromley: The energy costs in particular are a huge part of our operations and maintenance and capital budgets. How are you engaging our civil service to ensure that opportunities for savings on energy are realized? What are the real attempts to engage the full civil service in addressing this opportunity?

Hon. Floyd Roland: There are a number of avenues that we are engaged in, and have been for quite some time, in trying to address areas of savings, whether it's construction techniques, lighting fixtures, how we heat our facilities, and the quality of materials that are being used as we look at construction or renovation of our assets.

Another way of doing that, for example, is our energy committee that we've pulled together in cabinet as well as the infrastructure committee that is looking at our capital process and how we look at that type of infrastructure. There are a number of initiatives that draw on that. As well, I am open to ideas where we can draw on the collective spirit of our people within the Government of the Northwest Territories that may have some ways and ideas that we may not have engaged as of yet.

Mr. Bromley: Yeah, I think there are probably a lot of innovative ways. I know we have energy programs within the government where those with skills in the energy management side of things are engaged.

I'm talking about our full civil service, reward programs and so on. These have been demonstrated to work in many cases right here in the city of Yellowknife. There have been programs where tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars have been saved from operations and capital costs.

How will you engage our civil service as a complete and full body of employees to create the sort of suggestions and ideas — and follow up with evaluation and so on — that can lead to major savings and that will have many benefits in the way of the environment, our operational costs and their own jobs? This would be a highly motivated bunch of people, almost a volunteer service, who are intimately familiar with their work environments and aware of the opportunities, in many cases. How will you engage them in that opportunity to save their own jobs through savings?

Hon. Floyd Roland: I think we have initiated that process by having this discussion here in this Assembly. There are a number of avenues we could look at. We do have a Premier's web site, and we could look at having our staff make suggestions there. There could be a letter-writing campaign.

As well, our existing processes that we have structured with our cabinet committees can formally adopt a number of processes, trying to look at ways to find savings in the area of energy and other areas that would help us in saving costs as a government.

Mr. Speaker: A final, short supplementary, Mr. Bromley.

Mr. Bromley: Thank you to the Premier for that.

May I take that as a commitment that this government will act very soon on that opportunity, in at least the potential expectation that surprising levels of savings will be made if we engage our civil service early with that voluntary effort?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Yes, you can take that as a commitment. We will look at ways of trying to draw on the collective will of our people who are employed within the Government of the Northwest Territories, as well as individuals out there who look from the outside in and sometimes question the way we do things as a government. We're looking for suggestions. There are a number of ways we can do that, whether it's through, as I stated, the Premier's web site and the e-mail process through that, as well as our energy committee, which we can put some energy behind and focus to this.

QUESTION 23-16(2)
STRATEGIC REDUCTIONS
AND COST SAVINGS

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I support the strategic reductions that are being suggested to look for efficiencies on the \$135 million figure. But of course, as I've said before, the devil is in the details, and this side of the House, too, is lacking.

Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the Premier. I want to underscore some issues that he lived through. Back in the '90s we had layoffs, so I don't want any flashbacks of that. But is his government taking into consideration that every job we let go, quite possibly we're going to lose our grant from Canada? Layoffs mean payments — payoff payments, that is, when you do a layoff. So is his government taking those things into consideration, that if you are trimming jobs, those are the types of things we have to consider?

Hon. Floyd Roland: The last time I heard about "the devil's in the details," I made a comment, and somebody had clipped that piece and put it into another part of what I'd said, so I must be careful in my response.

I did hear the Member tell me I needed to heed his warning, so I'm here to respond in a positive fashion. There are a number of us who have lived through the past Assemblies. For example, in the '95-'96 days, the government of the day was taking

\$150 million out of the process and made some very drastic decisions at that point, and some would say we have not quite fully recovered from those. That's why we do have to look at what's being put on the table to ensure we've measured all the impacts of that. That's why we're going to need more time than we would normally require as we begin our business planning process.

Mr. Hawkins: As the Premier well knows.... Well, first of all, I've been to his office to tell him about some of the rumours that I hear at the Co-op or wherever the place is, so he's well aware of the fact that there are concerns out there. As well, I'm sure he's getting them from other Members.

Mr. Speaker, one of the big fears is that we're going to start repackaging things, like, for example, we're going to take a leg off the table and now we're going to call it a tripod. Are we going to start doing that with our programs — that we're going to start shuffling things and renaming them so that we give them new, fancy titles? I just want to make sure that we do this in a sensible way.

Can the Premier tell us today when the Regular Members will be able to see that detail and that type of packaging you're suggesting? Because we're getting a lot of questions over here, and I think people deserve good answers.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, I also agree we need to get good information to Members so that they be well informed of what the processes are. That's the undertaking we're involved with now: to get that information together and make sure that what we're going to present is something that is on the right path and that fits with those strategic initiatives we've discussed as part of our vision for the 16th Legislative Assembly and how many dollars we may reinvest in those areas. We've got to ensure, for example, that if a department is identifying an area that can be reduced or some savings that may occur, they don't overlap with initiatives that we're trying to put out. So that type of analysis has to happen.

As I've shared with committee, there's a timeline that we have, and building that forward, hopefully, we'll be able to present a very detailed package in early spring.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, I assume all Members received this letter, but I certainly received a letter yesterday. It was from the UNW, and one of the suggestions — I won't go through the whole letter, of course — was to consider things like hiring freezes, and just in case we do have to lay people over, that there are potential opportunities out there.

But I got this letter at the same time as I had another letter on my desk. It was one from the Housing Corporation, where they're now making

two vice-president positions. So we're asking for a pound of flesh on one side of the game, but then we're staffing vice-president positions, which are very bloated and very expensive.

Recognizing the situation, Mr. Speaker, will the Premier investigate this situation? And if these positions haven't been staffed as of this moment, will he put a pause on that, in light of the fact of the reductions? We are still about to see Sheila Fraser in about a month, now, to discuss the Housing Corp in general. Would he take a look at it?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, the Minister Responsible for the Housing Corporation has run his plan by Members. It's done within existing resources. As well as, again, areas that we would target for reduction would have to go through the evaluation to see if in fact they would impact on strategic initiatives. That work is yet to be done.

We are looking at the practice of hiring, what positions need to be filled. The message has been sent to the deputies to have a good look at what initiatives they are looking at and what areas they are targeting for savings. And we need to have that and take that into consideration as they go to fill certain positions.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, in light of all the reductions — potential reductions, I should stress — that are being put forward to your office, in the direction of the strategy that you are putting forward, are we getting real suggestions? Are we going through an exercise? Is this government being fed stuff that is unpalatable? Because if we are not getting buy-in from our senior, senior management, Mr. Speaker, then I would certainly be willing to lend the Premier a copy of my Sun Tzu *Art of War*, where you are supposed to lop off the head of a general if they don't listen to the message being delivered. That will certainly put the system back in order.

Is the Premier looking at this very hard so we put forward good, real suggestions and it doesn't cause a crumbling of our system?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, in meeting with the deputies when we initially gave them direction, I did say that as an Assembly, and number one as Premier, I would be held accountable for the actions that we are presenting. Members of this Assembly, as well, would be held accountable for what would be accepted by this Assembly. At the same time, that measurement and accountability would be held to our senior staff for what they presented or did not present. So that is part of the work that is going on and part of the evaluation to see what is being put forward.

As with every exercise in the short time frame that we are given to try to come up with results, there is some good information, which the Members talked

about: for example, vacancies. Through this exercise we would become aware of what vacancies are out there. That would be an easy area to look at, with no direct impact on individuals. So that type of information will be useful as we begin to put that plan together.

QUESTION 24-16(2)
DEH CHO BRIDGE PROJECT

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, my questions are again for the Premier. It gets back to access to information on the Deh Cho Bridge project.

I want to talk a bit about the concession agreement itself. That is the master agreement, and I mentioned this in my statement earlier. It addresses the development, the design, the construction, the operations, the maintenance and the management of this bridge project. It is a \$160 million bridge project, Mr. Speaker.

I think the government should provide that level of information on an agreement of that magnitude to the Members of this House. The last Premier had promised to come back to Members of this House with that information. That never happened. And again, here we are, four months into the life of this government, and we haven't seen the agreement. Mr. Speaker, I mentioned it earlier: we may have to subpoena the government. The House will subpoena the government to get a copy of that concession agreement.

I would like to ask the Premier if and when he will get us a copy of this concession agreement that is proving so elusive.

Hon. Floyd Roland: For those who are listening here, the threat of a subpoena is not what is going to initiate something. The fact is that I have already committed to Members in a meeting that I would be working the appropriate departments to get the right information so Members could have that information. When I worked with the Department of Transportation, I did commit to making that available to Members. As well, the chair of the committee has written a letter to myself, and we are getting the package ready to present.

So let's get over the theatrics here. We are working to try to work together, and we will be open and accountable to this Assembly. That is the way we want to operate in the 16th Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, I didn't take on this job to be in the theatre business; I took this job on to represent my constituents, to represent the public first here in the Northwest Territories, and I take my job very seriously. I would like to again ask the Premier: will the concession agreement in its entirety be part of the package that he is going to present to the Regular Members of this House?

Hon. Floyd Roland: As information was given or shared from previous governments with Members who have returned, as well as what I'd committed to Members in our discussions, as it's available, we'll present that. I don't know if it will be in its entirety, but we will provide what we can under the practice we have with cabinet and committee information. We'll be able to provide that to Members.

Mr. Ramsay: I'd like to know when that might happen. I mean, we've been waiting now four months since this government was in office. It's been four months since this agreement was signed. When will we get to see what's in it?

Hon. Floyd Roland: We should be able to do something within the next few days. I just made that commitment with them within the last couple of weeks. So we're putting that information together and responding. The letter I received from committee was dated the 28th of January — that's receiving it on my desk. So we're pulling that information together and getting it back in as timely a manner as possible.

QUESTION 25-16(2)
ENERGY AUDITS OF G.N.W.T. BUILDINGS

Mrs. Groenewegen: In follow-up to Mr. Bromley's Member's statement and questions, I daresay this government spends tremendous amounts of money on energy, on power, on fuel. We often hear horror stories about things like government vehicles running all day long in cold weather, and maybe a few of us have even seen that with our own eyes.

The other issue is government buildings. We own a lot of buildings. Right now the government has a policy whereby the private sector can get an energy audit done on a building with the assistance of the government. I'd like to ask — I don't know if it's the Premier; maybe it's the Minister of Public Works I should be asking — how many of our government buildings have had energy audits conducted on them that indicated measures could be taken to conserve energy?

Hon. Michael McLeod: The answer to the question is that 180 buildings have been scanned to date for investigation on excessive heat loss, and 139 of those are government buildings.

Mrs. Groenewegen: How are we progressing on addressing the information that was obtained on the 139 government buildings 393399 that have been scanned? We have the information. Now what are we doing about it?

Hon. Michael McLeod: As we move forward on developing new buildings and designing new buildings, we will be looking at using energy conservation issues as a guide. We have also embarked on looking at alternative sources of heat. The biggest one is the biomass, or the pellet stove,

or pellet furnaces, boilers, those things. We have most of our new facilities, our new buildings, especially the schools in N'dilo, Gamèti and Tulita, being designed in that manner, and also the school in Inuvik and Good Hope. So most of our new buildings are being designed with energy efficiency in mind. We're also looking at some of the guidelines set out by our government and other governments that we are using as a guide.

Mrs. Groenewegen: That's great for the buildings that are going forward, that we're constructing or adding to our inventory. But what about the 139 buildings that already have had energy audits or have been scanned and have come up, I'm sure, with a number of area recommendations where we could take measures that would reduce the energy consumption in those buildings? Where's the program related to those remedies?

Hon. Michael McLeod: As we move forward, we have to take into consideration sometimes the deferred maintenance on these facilities. We have to take into account the number of projects that are in mid-life mode, that have to be retrofitted. As we identify revenues or develop our budget, we will be looking to accommodate the energy efficiency as we retrofit a building or upgrade.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Mrs. Groenewegen: In other words, there is no plan. That's what I'm hearing. There is no organized plan of response to the information that would be obtained through an energy audit.

Let me ask just another question. Energy consumption has to do with where people set the thermostat in those buildings and where they find their comfort level in those buildings. Is there any policy within the G.N.W.T. that would preclude people from using as much energy as they would like when it comes to the heating of a building?

Hon. Michael McLeod: All our departments across the government follow our Energy Conservation Action Plan, and we in this department have given direction to our staff and to other departments that this is a priority of this government. We also have listed our buildings in terms of a priority one, two and three for an action plan to be developed.

Of course, the Members well know we don't have a budget approved at this point; however, as we move forward and develop one and target the investment areas, we can provide that information to all the Members.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

Item 9, written questions. Mr. Bromley.

Written Questions

QUESTION 2-16(2) G.N.W.T. EXPENDITURES ON ENERGY

Mr. Bromley: My questions are on G.N.W.T. expenditure on energy, and my questions are for the Minister Responsible for the Financial Management Board Secretariat.

- 1) What was the total amount spent by the G.N.W.T. and its boards and agencies on fuel oil, gasoline and electricity for each of the last three fiscal years?
- 2) What was the amount spent by the G.N.W.T. on tank farms and other infrastructure related to fossil fuels in each of the last three fiscal years?
- 3) What were the additional expenditures by the G.N.W.T. on transport of fossil fuels in each of the last three fiscal years?

Mr. Speaker: Item 10, returns to written questions. Item 11, replies to opening address. Item 12, petitions. Mr. Menicoche.

Petitions

PETITION 1-16(2) BUFFALO PROBLEM IN FORT LIARD

Mr. Menicoche: I have here a petition to deal with a buffalo problem in Fort Liard, signed by 140 residents.

Mr. Speaker: Item 13, reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 14, tabling of documents.

Tabling of Documents

Hon. Floyd Roland: I wish to table the following document entitled *Evolution of the N.W.T. Fiscal Framework, 2004-2008*.

Document 2-16(2), *Evolution of the N.W.T. Fiscal Framework, 2004-2008*, tabled.

Clerk of the House (Mr. Mercer): I would like to table a response to a petition provided by the Hon. Jackson Lafferty, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, in response to a petition tabled by Mr. David Krutko on November 27, 2007, on the matter of public housing costs in Fort McPherson.

Document 3-16(2), Response to Petition 2-16(1): Public Housing Costs in Fort McPherson, tabled.

Clerk of the House (Mr. Mercer): I would like to table a response to a petition provided the Hon. Jackson Lafferty, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, in response to a petition tabled by Mr. Delorey on November 27, 2007, regarding illegal activity in public housing in Hay River.

Document 4-16(2), Response to Petition 1-16(1): Illegal Activity in Public Housing in Hay River, tabled.

Mr. Ramsay: I wish to table the document *Benefit Cost Analysis Update on the Deh Cho Bridge Project*.

Document 5-16(2), *Benefit Cost Analysis of the Deh Cho Bridge Project*, tabled.

Mr. Speaker: Item 15, notices of motion. Item 16, notices of motion for first reading of bills. Item 17, motions. Item 18, first reading of bills. Item 19, second reading of bills. Item 20, consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters. Item 21, report of Committee of the Whole. Item 22, third reading of bills. Item 23, Orders of the Day. Mr. Clerk.

Orders of the Day

Clerk of the House (Mr. Mercer): Orders of the Day for Friday, February 8, 2008, 10:00 a.m.

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Ministers' Statements
- 3) Members' Statements
- 4) Returns to Oral Questions
- 5) Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
- 6) Acknowledgements
- 7) Oral Questions
- 8) Written Questions
- 9) Return to Written Questions
- 10) Replies to Opening Address
- 11) Petitions
- 12) Reports of Standing and Special Committees
- 13) Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
- 14) Tabling of Documents
- 15) Notices of Motion
- 16) Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
- 17) Motions
- 18) First Reading of Bills
 - Bill 1: Interim Appropriation Act, 2008-2009
 - Bill 2: Supplementary Appropriation Act, No. 3, 2007-2008
 - Bill 3: An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act
- 19) Second Reading of Bills
- 20) Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Minister's Statement 1-16(2)
- 21) Report of Committee of the Whole
- 22) Third Reading of Bills
- 23) Orders of the Day

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until Friday, February 8, 2008, at 10 a.m.

The House adjourned at 3:16 p.m.