



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

5th Session

Day 7

16th Assembly

HANSARD

Thursday, March 25, 2010

Pages 4757 - 4780

The Honourable Paul Delorey, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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(Tu Nedhe)

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Thursday, March 25, 2010****Members Present**

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

The House met at 1:36 p.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Paul Delorey): Good afternoon, colleagues. Welcome back to the Chamber. Item 2, Ministers' statements. The honourable Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, Mr. McLeod.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 17-16(5):
2010 ARCTIC WINTER GAMES

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise today to recognize the nearly 400 athletes, coaches, cultural performers and staff who represented the Northwest Territories at the 2010 Arctic Winter Games.

It was my pleasure to attend the games this year along with a number of my colleagues who were there to cheer for Team NWT. I wish to thank those Members for supporting our youth and volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, although there were many highlights during the games, and all of our teams and competitors did very well, a few events really stand out.

The NWT Speed Skating Team dominated the field because of their excellent preparation and coaching. In doing so, they proudly demonstrated a sense of fair play and sportsmanship that was second to none. They were gracious, courteous and helpful to their competitors and acted as excellent ambassadors for the NWT. I was very impressed with the maturity and dedication to their sport that these young athletes show.

During the games, I received word of a convoy of 10 vehicles driven by parents with elders who traveled from Deline to Grande Prairie to support their athletes. That is team support that most coaches can only dream of. Especially since, because of uncharacteristic warm weather, it was questionable whether the ice roads would still be open when they had to return to Deline.

Mr. Speaker, MACA has a great tradition of recognizing parents and other family members who travel to the games to support our team at an

appreciation breakfast. This is our way of saying thank you for those many early morning practices, long weekend competitions, fundraising and countless other duties family members carry out to support their youth in sport.

This year MACA was pleased to host more than 200 supporters at the breakfast. It was a phenomenal turnout and a good indication of how important sport and physical activity programs are in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, the 2010 Arctic Winter Games Host Committee and its nearly 3,000 volunteers did a fabulous job in Grande Prairie. This group included a small but dedicated group of volunteer officials from the NWT. They were outstanding hosts and organizers and showed us all why Northerners have such a great sporting tradition.

To Team NWT Chef de Mission Doug Rentmeister and his mission staff, coaches and other support staff -- thank you. You did an excellent job. I would also like to recognize the contributions made by MACA staff before and during the games.

Mr. Speaker, Team NWT included nearly 400 athletes, cultural participants, coaches and mission staff from 27 communities. Many of the athletes took home medals, 107 ulus to be exact, but all of them were champions for their hard work and dedication to a healthy lifestyle.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to invite my colleagues to join me in congratulating all participants. We are looking forward to the 2010 Games in Whitehorse, Yukon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, life is never dull in this building. Something is always happening. Sometimes we know it's going to happen, sometimes we don't, but there is never also any shortage of opinions no matter what the topic.

Today I, along with other Members, will speak to the controversial issue of changes to our Supplementary Health Benefits Program. I feel like we're jumping from the frying pan into the fire. We've spent the last several months sizzling in the pan over the very controversial bridge issue and we will now jump into the fire with the supplementary health benefits issue.

Just so everybody is aware, we're debating this issue because of a policy decision made by Cabinet in the 15th Assembly, the previous Assembly. The Executive of the current 16th Assembly has decided that the policy decision should now come into force, so here we are. As the 16th Assembly we seem to be destined to bear the burden of our predecessors' actions.

The Minister of Health and Social Services, in her statement yesterday, said that changes will expand access to the program for those who do not currently have access. The changes will make the program more fair and equitable and that it will be a step towards poverty reduction and addressing cost of living for our residents.

I agree with all of those statements. I've never disagreed with the philosophy behind the Cabinet policy decision or with the rationale for making changes to the Supp Health Program. We do need to ensure that all NWT residents have access to extended health benefits. At the moment some do not have that access. We do need to make the program fair and equitable and at the moment it is not.

My problem regarding the changes has been, and continues to be, with the way in which the changes will be made. About a month ago the Department of Health and Social Services released a discussion paper; a paper intended to allow NWT residents to consider the changes to the Supp Health Benefits Program and provide their input or comments. This week, consultation via town hall meetings began.

It all sounds good except that, like the first time around a year ago, the schedule for consultation and implementation is all wrong. There simply is not enough time in the schedule to get the public's views for the department to consider the input and develop a draft plan, to review the draft with members of the public, and then to have the three months identified by the Minister to prepare for implementation on September 1st.

There must be a second round of consultation to adequately consult with those affected by these changes. Implementation must be delayed to at least November 1st, preferably January 1st, 2011.

MR. SPEAKER: Ms. Bisaro, your time for your Member's statement has expired. Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Bromley.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MR. BROMLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak yet again on the issue of developing new policies on supplementary health coverage in the NWT. I support the intent to begin delivering coverage to all people of the North. Unfortunately, I still do not know how many new people this involves or what the estimated costs are.

I support concerns raised about how the department is proceeding. First -- and on a point that is repeatedly being raised by public client groups, individuals, families, constituents, and committee -- is the expected expedited time frame that the Minister is insisting upon. We have an informed and experienced public on this issue and they need a full opportunity to contribute in an iterative fashion to the development of this important work. They have my support and I equally insist that the Minister recognize this call. New information was provided just yesterday. Consultation must proceed through the fall, not 10 years from now, as the Minister likes to say, but through this fall for implementation in January 2011; 10 months from now.

Philosophically I disagree with the main approach being taken. We have a tax system that could and may already provide, through federal transfers, the resources needed to cover supp health benefits. Government's refusal to acknowledge and use this mechanism is leading to an ever more grossly deformed distribution of wealth and the rise of the super-rich. Continuing to ignore this responsibility contributes to the ongoing distortion and lack of resources for government to provide basic services that our public rightfully demands. Using the tax system to support the program simplifies administration, reduces costs and avoids the expensive and often justified difficulty of collecting payments.

The Minister proposes so-called net income thresholds, such as \$30,000 or \$50,000, used to define when those with supplementary health issues will have to pay for benefits. Let's be clear, these thresholds are not net income in the common understanding of the term. They are really gross income. Net income is pre-tax income from which a few miscellaneous deductions are made, such as northern benefits. If the department insists on this approach, it requires a critical look at what proportion the payments will be of real take-home pay to estimate actual impacts on the well-being of people.

I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted.

MR. BROMLEY: Further, income on its own is not a good measure of an individual's or a family's ability to pay. Families must also juggle housing challenges, higher cost of living in some areas, unequal access to income, other health issues and debts.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I hear little from the Minister about how she is reducing costs and increasing efficiencies for supplementary health. Pharmaceuticals are acknowledged as a big part of the bill, yet we are still awaiting action on bulk purchasing and other opportunities to manage these costs further. I have heard nothing yet about how we will encourage or insist on third-party insurance coverage.

Mr. Speaker, we can do better. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. The honourable Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES SYMPOSIUM

MR. MENICOCHÉ: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. [English translation not provided.]

Mr. Speaker, in 1993 the Assembly of First Nations declared the month of March to be Aboriginal Languages Month. Celebrations of aboriginal languages have occurred every year since. In the NWT the community teaching and learning centres are celebrating with a variety of events. In its press release to recognize this month, the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment assured the language communities that the GNWT is committed to continue its support of language and cultural activities.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment is hosting an Aboriginal Languages Symposium next week, and as chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations, I am pleased to be co-chairing the event with Minister Jackson Lafferty. The presentations and workshops will lead to identification of steps that will be taken in the future to keep our languages alive.

Mr. Speaker, maintaining our languages is very important. It seems that we have spent a great deal of time and money supporting energy initiatives and renewable resources to preserve our environment. We must apply that same level of commitment to preserving and renewing our languages. These languages hold our aboriginal culture, our uniqueness in the North and link us to our past so that we can enrich our future.

It seems that our neighbour, Nunavut, has been diligent with its work on preserving Inuit languages. In its 2010-2011 budget speech, Minister of Finance Keith Peterson made commitments to fulfil the intent of Nunavut's Official Languages Act and Inuit Language Protection Act. The Nunavut Language Summit was held in early February and

Nunavut has already scheduled an Inuit Language Standardization Symposium for this fall.

Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to next week's Aboriginal Languages Symposium when people concerned about languages will gather together at the Aboriginal Languages Symposium and their discussions will lead to strategies to support and strengthen our languages. I also look forward to the government showing its commitment to language revitalization in its 2011-12 budget, Mr. Speaker. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I, too, today would like to speak about the supplementary health benefits review. Mr. Speaker, the Hay River Seniors' Society has met to discuss the supplementary health benefits consultation, and I had the benefit of attending two sessions with the seniors.

Hay River is the second largest community in the Northwest Territories and is the home of many seniors who have retired after careers served there and some have ended their careers after serving in various other northern communities. Hay River has long been considered an ideal place to retire due to the somewhat lower cost of living. So while still in the NWT, seniors found retiring here to be an affordable option.

Hay River has a very active seniors' community and many continue to serve in various capacities and contribute very valuable services through volunteer organizations. At the meeting held on March 17th, which was well attended, various opinions and concerns were expressed. Firstly, the supplementary health benefits currently available to seniors over the age of 60 in the Northwest Territories are greatly appreciated. Seniors understand that life expectancies are increasing and that the demographic of seniors in the NWT is growing.

As the GNWT grapples with the sustainability and affordability of services in general, seniors wish their voices to be heard. The survey and consultation efforts really come down to a question of whether or not the provision of supplementary health benefits to NWT seniors should in any way be contingent upon or prorated by way of an income or means test.

The cost of living in the North is higher than in any other jurisdiction. Seniors mostly live on fixed incomes. The longer that seniors can remain healthy and independent both physically and

financially, the longer more costly care by the public is avoided. Seniors contribute to their communities in ways that are difficult to quantify or place a monetary value on.

The exodus of seniors from the North looking for a more affordable place to live would diminish an already declining NWT population. This would negatively affect the transfer from Canada. The GNWT expends resources in attempting to attract people to live, work and invest in the North, with limited success, Mr. Speaker. Equal attention should be paid to the efforts to retain the people that we already have. The NWT emphasizes and adheres to a principle of respect for elders.

Based on the above, it is the position of the Hay River Seniors' Society that the GNWT...

Mr. Speaker, I am running out of time here. I would just like to seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement, please.

---Unanimous consent granted.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Mr. Speaker, based on the above, it is the position of the Hay River Seniors' Society that the GNWT should place a high priority on the allocation of sufficient financial resources to support all NWT seniors not covered through other government programs for the provision of the existing supplementary health benefits regardless of their economic position or circumstances. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Abernethy.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MR. ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Public discussions started on Monday with respect to the proposed Supplemental Health Program that the Department of Health and Social Services would like to implement. As predicted, residents are very concerned with the approach that the department is taking.

I would like to share with you one e-mail that a constituent, Cornelius Van Dyke recently sent to the Minister of Health and Social Services. Mr. Van Dyke has agreed to let me read it here today.

Minister Lee, I had an opportunity to hear a representative from your department discuss this government's plans for the supplementary health benefits plan on Thursday night. This presentation was exclusively directed on discussing how the government currently pays for and how it might in future pay for the supplementary health benefits. Discussion about what would be covered under the revised plan and how it would affect individuals

was deflected to a later discussion at an unnamed time.

Since the ancient Greeks introduced the concept of a democratic government system, governments have generally moved slowly and carefully before introducing changes which would affect the governed populous. There are many instances over the extended time of unpopular changes resulting in the ultimate change in the government.

Your haste to bring in the changes to the Supplementary Health Benefits Plan is totally unreasonable. You have set an introduction date which does not allow reasonable discussion about the changes. It does not allow for reasonable give and take of varying points of view brought to the discussion by a wide selection of individuals and stakeholders. It does not allow the government to change its policies to accommodate the discussions and recommendations arrived at as a result of consultation with the affected people and stakeholders prior to the stated implementation date. It does not respond to the democratic rights of the population of the Northwest Territories and it does not reflect the exercises of its responsibilities by the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Your insistence that the implementation date for the changes to the supplementary health benefits will not be changed implied the hidden agenda and a disregard of the input by the people of the Northwest Territories.

I urge you to change the direction you are taking with this proposal. Careful consideration of all aspects of the proposed changes will result in a better product. Take the time needed for this careful consideration.

Yours truly, Cornelius Van Dyke, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with Mr. Van Dyke completely and have made statements and questions in this House asking the same questions. Clearly, the Minister is not listening or hearing the people. As such, later today I will once again be asking questions and hope that the Minister sees reason and decides to do what is right, just and for the public good. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join a number of my colleagues today in speaking about the proposed changes to supplementary health benefits. The Minister is very

quick to say there will be winners in these proposed changes. There will be, Mr. Speaker, but when someone wins, someone else is bound to lose. If the department and the government want to truly live up to the statement that all families should have fair and equal access to Government of the Northwest Territories funded programs and assist with the cost of uninsured health services, then they are going to have to fully explain to residents how the proposed changes are not fair or equitable and, in fact, Mr. Speaker, what the government is proposing seems predetermined, not having changed much since the last time we had this debate over a year ago in this House.

Let's be honest with our residents. This is a tax on the sick, those who are most vulnerable, and a direct attack on our seniors, most of whom are on a fixed income. If the Minister wants to address the gap that exists, then find a way to do that. But, Mr. Speaker, changes cannot be made on the backs of the sick and the elderly.

Income thresholds cannot be predetermined. Just because a household has an income of \$50,000 a year, these thresholds do not take into account the ability to pay. The Minister knows full well that the cost of living is one of the biggest issues facing our residents. She even chairs the Strategic Initiatives Committee on the Cost of Living. Why would she, of all people, be looking to put the screws to people who are sick, elderly, and already facing exorbitant costs to living here in the Northwest Territories?

A \$50,000-a-year family income here in the Northwest Territories is very much different than a \$50,000 family income in southern Canada. After paying food, bills, a mortgage, car payment, most middle income families here do not have anything left. Under the Minister's plan, God help them if one of them should get sick.

How can the Minister say what is being proposed is fair to everyone? The Non-Insured Health Benefits for aboriginal residents is funded by the federal government and, obviously, out of our realm of responsibility. However, the Extended Health Benefits Program for Metis persons is funded by this government. No changes are being proposed to this program.

I am not and do not believe there should be any changes to this program, but please stop using the words "fair" and "equitable" when it's just not a reality.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Beaulieu.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
HOME REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE
PROGRAMS FOR SENIORS

MR. BEAULIEU: Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker. [English translation not provided.]

Mr. Speaker, today I would like to once again speak about homeownership repairs for elders in Tu Nedhe. I have spoken on numerous occasions in this House and, if I ask the elders in my riding, there seems to be very little happening in the way of getting action for them on this matter.

Another winter has almost passed and many of the elders who own their own homes have endured another winter with inadequate homes due to much needed housing repairs. In many of these cases, the elders live alone, have limited income and limited education, so they rely heavily on the support and assistance of the NWT Housing Corporation staff and the repair programs they deliver.

When you look at the overall picture of elders owning their own homes, there really are not that many. With a limited number of units, I have asked why the NWT Housing Corporation does not seem to have the ability to help these elders.

I think this is a program development and policy issue. Prior to the development of new programs introduced about five years ago, over a four-year period the NWT Housing Corporation had reduced the core need in housing by 4 percent. That was headed in the right direction. Since the corporation introduced the new programs, the core need across the NWT has increased by 3 percent. The Minister must look at why this has occurred. Why did the core needs increase?

As I mentioned a few times previously, while waiting for repairs to be done on their homes, some of the elders have passed away. You would think that with seniors there should be more urgency placed on their needs for home repairs. Let's show some respect to our elders and assist them before the houses they are living in are completely dilapidated.

Later today I will have questions for the Minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation on this matter.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
NWT HOUSING CORPORATION
CAPITAL PLANNING CYCLE

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the 16th Assembly made a decision to change our capital planning process and approval of the main estimates. Now we approve our capital estimates in the fall session and the main estimates are being approved in the spring session.

One of the fundamental reasons for that was for the infrastructure departments to be able to take advantage of the construction season, logistical challenges such as taking advantage of the ice

roads, and ensuring that we are able to construct in a reasonable time and allow for the contractors and service providers to be able to take advantage of the highway season. In most cases most of our raw materials go into our communities on ice roads. This gets a fair price by allowing the contractors more time to be able to bid on these contracts.

All the departments have come on board on this initiative except for one of the major infrastructures in this government: the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation. I believe they are a major infrastructure department who should also consider this change.

In the last number of weeks going back to my constituents, elders' homes are being repaired in March. Homes are being jacked up in the middle of winter. This has an effect on the foundations of those homes. I sat down with a 96-year-old elder in Fort McPherson who was sitting at home, had nowhere else to go, and was in her home while they were changing the windows in her unit because she had no alternative place to go. They changed the door on her house and then left the scene of construction. She tried to get out of her home and couldn't because her door was blocked because the house had shifted. These types of things have an effect on winter construction.

I believe that we have to be realistic and have to try to take advantage of the main construction season, which should be during the summer months when we have warm weather and are able to jack up the house without having to worry about damaging anything like septic tanks and shifting houses.

At the appropriate time I will be asking the Minister of the Housing Corporation if the department has considered the changes that all the other infrastructure departments have done and if he will consider doing the same thing.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Member for Sahtu, Mr. Yakeleya.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
APPLICATION OF GNWT HOUSING POLICIES
ON SENIORS RESIDING WITH
EXTENDED FAMILY

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak about the importance of our younger generation caring for the elders. I've heard from a number of constituents on this subject. One man gave an example of a young person who could not stay with his grandparents or they would have to start paying rent. As well, he said that he had to quit his job to care for his mother when she was on her deathbed and because when he moved into her home her rent increased based on his income. He asked the departments to work together, rather than work against each other, to develop policies

that accommodate more than just one generation of families sharing one house.

Until elders enter extended care facilities, if they do, they will continue to live in their present home. It may be a home that they own or rent. In many cases they will live alone and, rightly so, rent free. Those who own their own home find it difficult to maintain a house on one pension. In the Sahtu where the elders could share their houses with children or grandchildren, they are discouraged from doing so. The household would have to pay rent geared to the children's income.

I would like to suggest that an incentive in the form of a reduced rental rate from the NWT Housing Corporation or a subsidy or payment for provisions of care from Health and Social Services should be considered. I think that some adults, singles or small families would choose to live with their parents or grandparents. There are many advantages to such arrangements.

Family contact is very important to our culture and elders should have families around them. Recently in the Sahtu there has been a case where an elder died all alone and this is very sad. It is unacceptable in our culture. Elders can stay in their homes longer if someone is sharing their home and checking on their well-being every day. As well, a younger generation can provide help with things like picking up groceries, getting elders to appointments at the health centre and ensuring medications are taken. Elders still have much to contribute, such as being there when children return from school and perhaps some cooking and sharing their cultural values, traditional skills and aboriginal languages.

I believe the Minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation should review the rental rates for extended families to provide an incentive for adult children to share a home with parents or elders. I'm not supporting overcrowding in our homes, but many of the rental homes have been built to house four or five or six people. Such a change in policy might be cost effective and free up some housing stock and continue our traditions of caring for the elders.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. The honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Hawkins.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to lend my voice to the many expressions of concern made here today by our Members about the Minister of Health's proposal for changing supplementary health benefits. Thus far the Minister seems to have her decision already

made up to rush the consultations through to stakeholders regarding how they feel. The process seems to change on the run. I wish the Minister could establish a realistic schedule and process that spells out to everyone in a way that we can understand, rather than what the Minister has already told us they're going to do.

The process that the Minister is currently engaged in now is not getting positive reviews, other than her staff telling her everything's going swimmingly. On the ground, seniors and other people will tell you that everything is not so well here.

As well, my concerns extend to how this process has been worked to ensure the people who are not presently covered and not eligible for current programs get covered immediately, so they do not face continued postponement. These are what we call the working poor. The Minister is quick to remind everyone and blame everyone in this Assembly that the implementation of the policy changes are done truly on the shoulders of Members. Members have not stopped the Minister from engaging and implementing a program that could cover the working poor. It's the Minister's fault that this has not been done, not ours.

Those changes could be done today without any delay and I have no doubt that would be warmly received and certainly supported in this Assembly to help our working poor. For the last two years there's been more time and frustration talking about playing with the Supplementary Health Benefits Program to rearrange what will end up doing nothing but making everybody mad.

I don't understand this Minister's definition of fairness. I don't think anybody understands this Minister's definition of fairness, other than the fact that there's a philosophy of taking something that's been treasured by many, taken away to give to others. Any parent can tell you that if you have two children, when you take something away and just to give it to the other child, it is not reasonable parenting. Why does the Minister think that this is Health Benefits 101, to take from one group to give to the other? This is insanity and a ridiculous initiative that needs to stop today.

There has to be a better way to do this. As I've said several times, this Minister could bring forward a proposal in detail to this House to cover the working poor and I guarantee you it would be warmly received in this House and in this Territory.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Item 4, reports of standing and special committees. Item 5, returns to oral questions. Item 6, recognition of visitors in the gallery. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize a couple of hardworking Pages today from the constituency of Frame Lake: brother and sister Stuart Hamre and Martha Hamre have been working very hard for us this week.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. Item 7, acknowledgements. Item 8, oral questions. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Beaulieu.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 83-16(5): HOME REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE PROGRAMS FOR SENIORS

MR. BEAULIEU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I spoke about homeownership repairs for elders in Tu Nedhe. I'd like to follow up my statement with questions for the Minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation. As mentioned in my statement, when you look at the numbers of units in Tu Nedhe owned by elders, they are not many. I also mentioned the housing issues in this sector of our population should be treated with more urgency. I would like to ask the Minister if he would commit to separating elders core need from other families so that the Housing Corporation can focus on elders' housing issues.

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

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can inform the Member that we do have new management in the South Slave and they are in the process of targeting seniors based on visits to the community. They do want to have better communication and a lot of communication with seniors, and they'll work with the seniors to assist them in processing their applications and provide translation as needed.

MR. BEAULIEU: To help kick-start this initiative and gather some good baseline information on the elders' housing situation in Tu Nedhe, will the Minister agree to direct his staff to visit each of the elders' households in Tu Nedhe?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, the staff are planning on targeting seniors and if that means meeting with them, having one-on-ones with them in their home with translation provided, then that's the direction that they're going to take from now on. I would like to make it quite clear that this initiative is targeted at seniors and the ones who are not able to get around as well as they'd like to. Thank you.

MR. BEAULIEU: Mr. Speaker, with the short construction season, in addition to Lutselk'e being a

barge community, will the Minister commit to ensuring that the staff get the much needed materials into Lutselk'e to address the elders' housing issues in Lutselk'e? Thank you.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, the program intake starts in September and we do use that to try and get the applications approved as quickly as possible and have the materials either brought in by winter road or during the beginning of the barge season. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Your final supplementary, Mr. Beaulieu.

MR. BEAULIEU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that means Lutselk'e is getting a winter road.

---Laughter

Mr. Speaker, we're nearing the end of this government and I think it's important, in the area of homeownership and the area of housing, that we develop some sort of elders' housing strategy. Would the Minister commit to starting or completing some sort of an elders' housing strategy to address the housing issues for the elders across the Territories? Thank you.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, I meant delivery to those communities that are accessible by winter road. I thought I would clarify that.

Mr. Speaker, recognizing the importance of housing to seniors and some of the conditions of some of the houses, the Housing Corp has taken some programs on to assist seniors with their housing. This is just another step in the whole process. I think it's a positive step and I think it's something that the seniors will welcome, you know, with the preventative maintenance where once they're on the list, they continue to get the program every year. So we recognize the importance of improving the delivery of service to seniors and we're taking steps to address that. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Member for Sahtu, Mr. Yakeleya.

QUESTION 84-16(5):
APPLICATION OF GNWT HOUSING
POLICIES ON SENIORS RESIDING
WITH EXTENDED FAMILY

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in my Member's statement I talked about the elders and the care for the elders. I want to ask the Minister for the NWT Housing Corporation, in terms of a policy review or consideration, would it be possible that if a child or grandchild or an adult exchange a promise of assistance to support the elders in their homes in terms of a cost of rent increase, is that something that can be looked at? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. The honourable Minister responsible for the Northwest

Territories Housing Corporation, Mr. Robert McLeod.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are policies set in place for certain reasons, and as much as we'd like to have people in units with the elders looking after them, there is opportunity for them to do that. What we don't want to get into starting here, and there has been some discussion of this in the past where folks that are working will move in with seniors, realizing that the seniors pay no rent. So we need to get away from that. However, we would like to see the best conditions possible for seniors. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. YAKELEYA: Certainly I've considered that also, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the use of the program there is for seniors is for free rent and people, when they do move in, take advantage of this in terms of the free rent. What we're asking in terms of looking at a policy and maybe with the Health and Social Services or some kind of a program where there would be a subsidy or some payment for provisions for elderly care, maybe a reduced rent but not to look at where the elders would have a huge increase in the rent due to this initiative. This, again, looks at caring for the elders, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, I can commit to the Member that we can have some discussions, interdepartmental and myself, and the Ministers of ECE and Health and Social Services to see if there are some options there that we can possibly look at. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

QUESTION 85-16(5):
HOUSING CORPORATION
CAPITAL PLANNING CYCLE

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are directed to the Minister of the Housing Corporation. It's in regard to the way capital infrastructure is now being approved through this House. In most cases most of our infrastructure departments are now being approved in the fall session so it allows for the departments to be able to allow their contracts to be let in the fall, allow for logistics to get those materials and contracts in place before the spring session, get them into our communities on the ice roads, and also ensure that we take advantage of the long summer construction season so that we're not constructing facilities in the middle of the winter. So I'd just like to ask the Minister, has the Housing Corporation considered also applying this policy to the department when it comes to building infrastructure, regardless if it's a housing unit, elders repairs or whatever. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation, Mr. Robert McLeod.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this has been a concern raised by a number of communities because it does happen. I have instructed the department to possibly look at coming forward in the fall with our infrastructure requirements and have that as part of the infrastructure budget in the fall. Thank you.

MR. KRUTKO: Mr. Speaker, I believe that by logistically working together with other departments it will also allow for possible savings in getting a lot of these materials into our communities. We do have fuel resupply; we do have the winter road construction, which they have open roads to ensure that we are able to resupply those communities. So I would like to thank the Minister for that, but how soon does the Minister intend to come back to the House with the assurance that that decision has been made? Are we talking this fall capital session? Will we see that being approved in that session? Thank you.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, we totally recognize the benefits of having winter delivery. I've heard from contractors where the prices could possibly go down if we change our cycle, but I can commit to the Member and Members of this House that it is our intent to try and come forward this fall, as part of this fall's infrastructure budget, with our infrastructure budget for the next fiscal year. Thank you.

MR. KRUTKO: Mr. Speaker, also I think for the residents and also talking to the contractors, for them, they'd sooner be building in the summer months than having to conclude their construction possibly right to the year end, because most of them do have contracts by way of supply, ship and erect where they have to...(inaudible)...but then also their contract is usually coming to an end March 31st and they're trying to get all their work done before year end and a lot of them are basically trying to construct in the middle of winter. So, again, I think it's an advantage to take advantage of the weather we have up here and, more importantly, do all our construction in the summer months. So I'd like to ask the Minister if he's able to consider the opportunity to conclude these contracts in the summer months and not have the construction taking place in the winter months like they are now. Thank you.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, the Member is absolutely correct; it's the time of year that you're building that makes a big difference in the quality of the product and the prices that you get. That's why we'd like to come forward in the fall time with our infrastructure budget, have that approved by this Assembly in the fall, then we could

start putting out tenders for contracts so the material can be delivered early and the work can begin as soon as the weather warms up. As it stands right now, sometimes we have construction starting in July/August, when the material finally arrives. So we're hoping to rectify that by bringing our infrastructure budget in line with the rest of the government. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

QUESTION 86-16(5):

PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are addressed to the Minister for Health and Social Services today. I mentioned in my statement that a discussion paper was released relative to the supplementary health benefits changes a little while ago. In speaking to the Minister in committee and in the House, the Minister has maintained from the outset that this discussion paper is objective, that there's no predetermined outcome. But I guess I have to disagree, and I think other Members do as well. The other day, in reference to the public and the public's response to the information in the paper that's now available and people are starting to read, the Minister stated they know where we're headed. I'd like to ask the Minister if she could explain that comment, please.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. The honourable Minister of Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

HON. SANDY LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Listening to the Member's statement quite closely, it appears that she knows exactly where this policy is headed, what the intent is, what we are trying to achieve, what unfairness and inequities that we are trying to ameliorate, because in fact she just said about 10 minutes ago that she agrees with the intent and the overall approach of this but that she would like it delayed until November. Putting aside the process, if she likes this policy, what is it that she would like to achieve by delaying the process, Mr. Speaker? Thank you.

MS. BISARO: Mr. Speaker, I don't think there was any reference to my question in there, but I will just kind of carry on.

To the Minister's comment that I know where things are going, I know where the department wants us to think we are going. I know where the paper wants us to think we are going. I would like to say to the Minister we got some financial information the other day, some income threshold information, and I'd like to thank the Minister for that information that we got the other morning, but it presented almost more questions than it answered.

I would like to know from the Minister, because we didn't get that information when we asked for it, but I particularly need to know, to consider these changes, how many of our NWT residents do not currently have access to the Supplementary Health Benefits Program. Thank you.

HON. SANDY LEE: Mr. Speaker, the information that we presented to the standing committee Tuesday morning has now been posted on the website and there is very detailed information about what number of residents in the Territories currently have no access to extended health benefits whether through the government program or third-party insurance. The proposal we are making is that depending on where the income threshold is, whether it is \$30,000 or \$50,000, and remembering again that that is the starting threshold so that if the income threshold was at \$50,000, any family making a net income between \$50,000 to \$170,000, depending on the family size, would get covered 100 percent.

This is the most robust Supplementary Health Program available anywhere in the country. Substance is good. I would like us to have a debate about the substance. If the Member has a better idea about how to improve and make our program more fair, let's hear about it. Thank you.

MS. BISARO: Mr. Speaker, I have to confess I was having a bit of a sidebar. I don't think I heard a number as to how many residents are not currently covered. I guess I would like to ask the Minister... To go to her statement, yes, there are other ideas out there, but there really is no option, given the schedule that we are working under. I will try to question again. How many residents do not currently have access to supplementary health benefits? Thank you.

HON. SANDY LEE: Mr. Speaker, the existing Extended Health Benefits Program is such that we know who is accessing the program and those who are accessing the program are those who are over 60 or who have a chronic condition or who right now make less than \$30,000 which qualifies them as indigent. The information we have on the website says that there are a total number of 3,160 people who do not have extended health benefits coverage or a third-party insurance. That is the number we are trying to work with. Under our proposal, we could cover over 2,000 people out of this 3,000 people. Not only that, unlike the previous proposal, those who are covered 100 percent will still be covered. It is just that we are asking those who could afford to pay, to make a contribution. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. Final supplementary, Ms. Bisaro.

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the Minister for that. I already knew that number. She is referencing the number of people who are

currently accessing the system. There are others who are not. I think it is incumbent upon the government to estimate those people who are not currently covered, who are not currently accessing the system so that we can then know what kind of costs we are incurring.

I would like to know from the Minister... We are going to have consultation. We are going to consider input, presumably. We are going to make a decision and draft a new program. I would like to ask the Minister how are those proposed changes going to be communicated to Members and when, to Members and to residents. Thank you.

HON. SANDY LEE: Mr. Speaker, we have had very open and healthy dialogue and information sessions with the standing committee. The public hearing just started this Monday. The second one was in Hay River and they will go into all of the regional centres. We have been communicating through the website. Our people are responding. The interchange is quite productive. Our people wanted to know what we are considering for a threshold, because people want to have something solid to see how they are impacted. We have posted them on-line and the Members have details of that.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Member would like to have more information than not, but perhaps she could consider 2,000 people who are going to benefit. Those are the people who do not have benefits right now who will benefit. I need to really wonder. I have to ask her does benefiting 2,000 people who are not benefiting now mean anything to us as a policymaker? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Bromley.

QUESTION 87-16(5):
GNWT PARTICIPATION IN
NATIONAL ENERGY BOARD HEARINGS
ON THE MACKENZIE GAS PROJECT

MR. BROMLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of ITI and I want to refer to a couple of tabled documents from yesterday, a letter from Imperial Oil updating their economic feasibility to the Mackenzie Gas Project, a letter from Lawson Lundell in which the GNWT declines the opportunity to cross-examine Imperial Oil's witness at a couple of hearings along with the rest of the public. The economic feasibility update notes that the start-up for the MGP would be 2018 at the earliest, about nine years from now. I am wondering why the government has decided not to participate in that hearing and ask questions and draw out information that could be useful in informing both us and the public. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. The honourable Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment, Mr. Bob McLeod.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will try to answer that question in a very short period of time. As the Member knows, the Government of the Northwest Territories and particularly the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment has been fully engaged in the NEB process since the proponents filed their project description in October 2004. We were working on an agreed upon process until late in 2009 when, with the lengthy delay in completing the regulatory process and the delay in getting the JRP report, the National Energy Board in its wisdom decided to change the order in which interveners would respond. So that instead of the responsible Ministers from the various departments responding to the Joint Review Panel first and the NEB holding public hearings, it was decided by NEB, without input from our government or other governments, as far as I know, to hold their hearings in advance of responsible Ministers responding to the Joint Review Panel and primarily to shorten the time period because it had taken so long to receive the Joint Review Panel report. To continue with their original schedule would have added probably another four to six months to an extremely lengthy process. Because of that, there were certain legal implications to our government.

Primarily we are very concerned about allegations of predetermination and apprehension of bias, which could lead to legal proceedings calling for judicial review. We do not want to bias our responsible Minister, who is the Minister of ENR, in responding to the Joint Review Panel recommendations. As such, we are being very careful in determining which hearings we would participate in and we are aiming to primarily participate in final arguments.

MR. BROMLEY: That's an interesting and complicated response. I'd like to explore that a little further, but I'm wondering if it does not serve us to examine the assumptions that are being made on the largest infrastructure project ever conceived for the Northwest Territories and become informed and probe those as this side of the House does for any assumptions that the government comes up with in order to be responsible to our public and to be able to make informed opinions. Obviously the timing of this, there are convolutions to it that are difficult to discuss in this format. I'm wondering how we will deal with that. I think the Minister probably has questions about some of the assumptions in the report from Imperial Oil. I would think that as a responsible authority he certainly should have. I think the question is clear. I'm wondering how we're going to fulfill that role in a way that serves our public.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: As the Member recognized, this is a very complex area and as such we're relying a lot on legal counsel and advice that we're receiving. A lot of the quantified support and conditions that our government raised, I think there were 76 conditions that were raised way back in 2005-2006. At that time there was a lot of input sought from all the Members of the Legislative Assembly. Now we have come to the point where in order to be able to present in final arguments to NEB before the Joint Review Panel provides their response, we have to measure our responses in a way so that we do not appear to be predetermining the responsible Minister's answer. So we will be focusing our final arguments on specific areas of a technical nature that we have identified in the original submissions and we're not going to stray very far from that.

With regard to the specific hearing on the economic feasibility evidence, we have looked at what was provided and we feel that we are satisfied with the technical evidence that has been put forward.

MR. BROMLEY: I'd say one assumption that I think would be worthy of some probing is the assumption that, well, OVRL notes, Imperial Oil notes that natural gas production from shale gas in both Canada and the U.S. is going up. Of course, that's what has depressed gas prices now. I think that's a well-established fact. Yet they say that these economic conditions will still be favourable for the project. I would think that would be an obvious one to pursue.

Sort of fundamental to this is there was nothing confidential required to consider this question. Why did the government not come to the Regular MLAs and have their input here? If there was a legal side binder to it, then we would have heard about that, but when are we going to start participating in this project?

HON. BOB MCLEOD: All the Members were briefed on the legalities of dealing with the Joint Review Panel. One of the primary issues was the fact that we have three Members of this Legislative Assembly that are interveners in the Joint Review Panel process. As such, we don't really have a process because there's been no agreed upon process for dealing with the Members of the Legislative Assembly that are not interveners. According to the regulatory process, if we are to deal with one intervener, we have to deal with all the interveners at the same time.

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

MR. BROMLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't bother correcting the Minister again on the number of interveners we have. Given that 2018 is the earliest we can envision an operating pipeline and given the ridiculous degree to which this government has hitched its star to this project, what

plan is there to proceed with economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable economic development that will benefit our people in the meantime?

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Because of the cautions about predetermination, we will be taking a very active role and a lot of it will depend on the recommendations of and the government response to the Joint Review Panel recommendations and the recommendations that are accepted by the National Energy Board. On that basis we will work on the premise that the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, if approved, should be sustainable and should provide for benefits for people in the Northwest Territories.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Hawkins.

QUESTION 88-16(5):
PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sunday past I watched an historic vote in the House of Representatives in the United States where Obama's presidency was finally able to muster up enough support to pass health benefits to those who did not have health benefits. They did not worry about the cost as the driving factor. They worried about the principles of rights to make sure people were covered.

The problem we're dealing with here now is that the Department of Health and Social Services has not identified the actual cost to delivering those types of rights to the people we have defined as the working poor. Would the Minister tell this House immediately how much it would cost to cover the working poor, that has constantly been referred to as the group that's been left without, in order for this House to have a full and reasonable debate on this topic?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. The honourable Minister responsible for Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

HON. SANDY LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the Member really thought about that question, and I don't mean to be, I mean this in a very, no disrespect. If the Member really thought about this question, he would know that he's asking me to project what a health expense will be of our residents. How could anybody do that? For example, myself, I'm quite healthy. I don't see doctors very well. I mean very much. I am a pretty low-cost NWT resident in terms of health care right now. Tomorrow I could develop an illness. I could have a heart attack. Who knows? I don't know what I'm going to cost the health system. I do not know that. I could tell you what I contribute financially to

the GNWT. Remember, to say how much it would cost to bring everybody in is not a question anybody can answer.

On the other hand, we have provided the Members of the committee and Members of this House and the general public about in general how many people are going to benefit from the changes we are proposing. We know, and it's on the website, that at least 2,299 people, who right now have either no benefit under supplementary health, or limited benefit, will gain access. Two thousand two hundred ninety-nine people. I can't tell you how much that's going to cost us because somebody may just have limited dental benefits or prescription glasses or a \$2,000 drug cost. Somebody could develop a disease tomorrow and that could cost us \$500,000.

We need to be reasonable about the level of information that we need to make an important public policy decision that is really aimed at and designed and is proven to help those who really need it.

MR. HAWKINS: I'm glad we have a low-maintenance Minister over there on our health system. I think the Minister answered the question herself. She has basically said that we've identified 2,299 people. How do you know that the messing around of the system will cover those 2,299 people? Tinkering with the system has not guaranteed anything. That's the whole point of where I'm going with this. With all of these studies, analyses and changes, somebody should be able to give us context of what a projected cost of this would be. There's been zero analysis on that to date.

The point I'm making is we have a butcher in charge of this policy, not the skills of a surgeon, going through this item by item. What is stopping the Minister from taking the time to direct her staff to do a thorough and complete analysis of what this would estimate out to be?

HON. SANDY LEE: What is stopping the Minister? Nothing is stopping the Minister. I have a proposal right here. It's on the website in colour. There's no messing about. Certainly it's far from zero analysis. We have not had more in-depth analysis of what our residents' income profiles are and what level of claims they have been filing. The Member has right in front of him a proposal that would help the working poor. I don't understand why he's saying go back and do something that would help the working poor. This proposal right in front of him shows that 2,299 stand to benefit under this program who do not benefit right now.

MR. HAWKINS: I'm not sure what the Minister's doing over there because if she can't project what 2,299 people will cost, how do they project what a budget costs for the Department of Health? Why do we even bother with a budget for the Department of

Health? Why do we even bother trying to earmark costs for supplementary health benefits? If we have no idea what's happening over there, why do we even bother having anyone manage it? It's kind of confusing.

Those are the type of things we have experts who can predict costs for, who are able to follow through and find some reasonable assumptions. We make them all the time when people do estimating, budgeting and planning. The Minister says there's nothing stopping her. Why doesn't the Minister stop, order an analysis as to what this will cost, and bring that for full and reasonable and thorough debate in this House?

HON. SANDY LEE: The issue here before us is that the extended health benefits as they are set up are not fair or equitable. We have statistical information that shows that the income spread of our residents are such that it has no boundary between ages or whether they're sick. Our program right now covers by age or by specified condition. We are saying that all of our information shows that's not the most fair and equitable way. We have tons of analysis that is on the website that we are sharing. What we are saying is, can we not change the criteria so that we look at one's ability to pay? What we are proposing is such that anybody whose income is \$50,000 to \$150,000 would have 100 percent coverage. After that our residents will be asked to pay a little bit out of their own ability to pay. Nobody's going to fall off right at that point. It's just that people who can afford to contribute will be asked to pay some.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the beginning of this process when this side of the House and the champions in our communities came forward to say that this was completely wrong, this approach, there was a promise of a clean slate, the removal of an income means test as the philosophy, and yet that did not come forward. The Minister continues to say that the saving grace of this Supplementary Health Benefits Plan is to take from Peter to pay Paul.

What is stopping the Minister from doing a thorough analysis when we constantly hear about how much data and work they've done today? The one thing that can be the true factor for all of the basis of this discussion is the analysis of what it would cost to include this additional group called our working poor. No one wants that to happen. Why does the Minister keep defending every other topic under the moon, under the sun, under the heavens, other than dealing with that one question of why don't we do that analysis and get it before this House so that we can have a true and thorough debate? Thank you.

HON. SANDY LEE: Mr. Speaker, all the information is there for the Member to say whether he supports an approach that would make the program more fair and equitable and extend the coverage to those who need it the most. This is not a situation of taking money out of Peter and paying Paul. This is a situation where we are trying to increase Peters. We are trying to make more Peters; we're not trying to take money from Peter to pay Paul. We want to expand the number of Peters. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 89-16(5):
PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask questions to the Minister of Health and Social Services primarily from the point of view of the concerns of my constituents in Hay River who are senior citizens.

Now, I first of all want to say that we have a remarkable package of services and support under our health and social services system for the seniors in the Northwest Territories. We have chosen, we have paid for that, we have done that. I need to know what analysis has been done about the impacts or the potential impacts of now pulling that back and not having that. We hear about the cost of living in the communities. We hear about seniors on fixed incomes, and no doubt there are folks who are receiving these benefits who are in a higher income bracket, but this is what they have become accustomed to. They have a higher income bracket, but they also probably have higher expenses than most seniors who might live down south and we don't want to lose...(inaudible)... Has the analysis been done on the impact if we were to lose seniors out of the Northwest Territories as a result of these changes? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Minister responsible for Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

HON. SANDY LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also received the letter that the Member is talking about and we are aware of the concerns that the seniors have. The important thing to know is that our information shows that this will benefit seniors on fixed incomes and low income in the same way as it would benefit every citizen who's on a lower income. Our information has shown that there are people over 60 who have high incomes, just as there is for any other age group. So, Mr. Speaker, the fact is, even with these changes, this Extended Health Benefits Program will be very robust. So there will not be another program, even for the

seniors, that's going to be much better that it would encourage them to move.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think we should look at this chart that shows exactly what the income level is and what the threshold is and who would continue to get 100 percent coverage, and at which income level they would start contributing to the cost of extended health benefits, and you will find that even for those who are making \$190,000 of income, no matter what age, that they would still get support from this government. I have to tell you, in no other jurisdiction would you still get extended health benefits at \$190,000 net income, of any age. Thank you.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Mr. Speaker, because the seniors who are currently receiving the benefit of this program regardless of income who are over 60 years of age in the Northwest Territories have planned that they would have this coverage, have become accustomed to this coverage, has the Department of Health and Social Services given any thought to grandfathering those folks who are already covered by this and phasing in a change to supplementary health benefits so that younger people like myself, for example, could begin at an earlier age to start to plan for the fact that they may need to think about insurance or putting money aside for sickness or so on? Has any thought been given to that? Because I'm just very afraid of the outcome of pulling this back from people who are already receiving it. Thank you.

HON. SANDY LEE: We are interested in listening to our public about transitional measures or the option of grandfathering. That was discussed with the stakeholder groups. Some have said no. We are getting feedback on that on the website; people are divided on yes or no. But definitely that is a legitimate issue for discussion and I'd be happy to receive input from the Members and others out there. Thank you.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Mr. Speaker, to be clear, what is driving this change to our policy on supplementary health benefits? From what I understand is the projected costs going forward and the sustainability of those costs and also the people who are not currently receiving coverage, there's a group, there's a gap, there's a group that are left out. If it is the cost that is driving this review, I think that the issue of cost, which Ms. Lee has indicated, is not something easy to quantify. It is difficult to have a fulsome debate on this when we don't know what those costs would be. Because those are the kinds of decisions that government and policymakers can make, that they say it's going to cost us this much, even on a projected basis. Well, we choose and we say that is a good expenditure of public funds and we want to do that. So, I mean, are there any costs that are part of this equation in this consideration? Thank you.

HON. SANDY LEE: The Member knows and everybody here knows projecting to the last dollar what our health care expenditures are going to be, whether how much it will cost to run Stanton tomorrow or Extended Health Benefits Program, what's it going to be at Hay River, whatever, that is, I mean, there are lots of formulas to do that, but at the end of the day, it's a projection.

Mr. Speaker, sustainability of health care programs is a national issue. It's an issue for every government. We know that on the whole that we will continue to see increases and we budget accordingly. So sustainability is an issue that we need to consider, but the thrust of this policy is not to reduce costs or to decrease costs, but it is to see how do we fix this program so that it works better. Because we know that it's not working as well as it should. The program criteria that it has is not backed up by evidence, because we know that people of all ages have all different incomes and ability to pay and different medical needs. We are, right now, under the existing policy, excluding a whole bunch of groups of people, and we are trying to find a way to see if we can bring them on, and to ask those who can afford to pay something, to contribute to their health care costs. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. Your final supplementary, Mrs. Groenewegen.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So it is about the redistribution of resources. It is taking resources which are now expended on behalf of those seniors who are in a certain income bracket and re-profiling those resources to a group of people who are not receiving them. So it is a redistribution of the resources this government has. But if we were given a number and we were told, Members of the Legislature, if we would commit to expend this much money, we could take care of the folks who aren't being looked after plus we could leave the Seniors Supplementary Health Benefits the way they are. But how can we make that decision in a vacuum, in the absence of any kind of financial projections? That's the kind of information I'm saying that we need in order to make a decision like that. Is there any effort on the Department of Health and Social Services, even on a projection basis, to estimate what it would cost to include those people who are not covered now, while at the same time not taking anything away from those people who are covered? Thank you.

HON. SANDY LEE: I know that any debate about health benefits is difficult, it's emotional, and it's a difficult thing to do. In answering the Member's question, it is a little bit about redistributing resources, but most importantly, Mr. Speaker, it's about fairness.

I hope you don't mind if I use this example, but it just keeps coming at me. In this Assembly there is myself, MLA Bisaro, the Member herself, Member

Ramsay, Member Bromley, Member Abernethy and Member Hawkins who would belong to this program. Right now, when some of us hit 60 years old, they will get so many dollars for glasses and \$1,000 dental benefits. We have very nice third-party coverage through our employer. I don't know why anybody here among us that I just named, when they turn 60, they automatically get dental benefits and eyeglasses when I don't -- I guess I will when I hit 60 -- when we could get that coverage by our employer insurance and especially when there are people out there who do not get benefit of that dental benefit and eyeglasses even if they can afford it because they are not 60 and we do not look at their ability to pay. I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, all six of us could afford to pay our own dental benefits. This is not just about redistribution of resources; it is about what is fair and what is equitable. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Abernethy.

QUESTION 90-16(5):
PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MR. ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister is right; this is about what is fair, this is about what is right, this is about what is just. I also can't agree that the intent behind what we are doing here is sound. We want to support the low income families, the low income earners who don't currently have insurance now. The problem is how this Minister and this department happened to be going about the process.

The Minister said we need to have a debate about substance. Yes, please, let's have a debate about substance. The problem is it would be difficult to have a debate about substance when the information the Minister agreed to get after we passed our motion didn't come forward. They didn't go out to talk to the stakeholders. They didn't consider options. They didn't research around other options. That is what the Minister said she was going to do. If the Minister had done that, we would have the information to have a debate about substance, a well-rounded, thorough debate about substance. We can't have it now. Why didn't the Minister go get the information that she said she was going to get after the debate, after the motion? We need that information to have this debate. We can't have this debate. All this dancing around she is doing isn't helping us do the right thing to the people of the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. The honourable Minister of Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

HON. SANDY LEE: Mr. Speaker, I don't understand why the Member thinks that he can't put input into this process. Exactly what is the problem he has with the substance? What is it about the program as proposed that he doesn't agree with or support?

Mr. Speaker, public meetings started this Monday. We are going to continue to have public meetings. In preparation for those public meetings and public consultations, we posted a conversation document a month ago. We are in the middle of the debate. Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear from the Member what in substance does he have a problem with. Thank you.

MR. ABERNETHY: Mr. Speaker, it is nice that they are asking us questions for a change. Technically, I can't say what I have wrong with the substance, because in order to make a fair and accurate assessment of whether this program that they are proposing is a right one, we need options to consider. We need alternatives to consider. Research should have been done on this. When we did the motion, Mr. Speaker, the motion included a discussion around the department going out and meeting with the potentially affected stakeholders to get that information, get those options and they were going to research it. The Minister said they would talk to the stakeholders and get that information. They should be coming back to us with all of that information. What the result might be is this might be the best program, but without all of these alternatives we will never know and never be able to make the decision that this is the best. I want that information. The Minister said she was going to give it. Why didn't she provide us with that information that she said she was going to provide? It is simple. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SANDY LEE: Mr. Speaker, the direction of the House and the result of the last discussions were that people wanted to know more about who were using this program, how the income threshold would impact the residents who were covered and who would not be covered anymore. At that time we suffered from not having enough detailed information about exactly who was served by this program.

Mr. Speaker, as I stated already, there hasn't been, I don't think, a more thorough analysis of a program like we have presented as a result of doing this research for the last number of months and we are putting the information out there. But we understand that people may need more information to have a better discussion and we are willing to provide the information. So, Mr. Speaker, if the Member has more information he needs, I'd be happy to do everything I can to provide it. Thank you.

MR. ABERNETHY: The Minister seems to remember the parts of the motion and the debate

that support her case. What she's not talking about here is that we are also asking for alternatives and options. I don't see alternatives and options. Yes, they've done a lot of research, I've got to tell you. The product they are providing to us now has way more research. It's a lot of research, it's good information, it explains a lot to defend the model that they want to put forward. Where are the alternatives? Where are the options? Those options would have come from the stakeholders that she promised that she would consult with if they'd actually had consultations over a year ago. They didn't. So I guess I'm going to ask: why didn't the Minister ask -- and we all know she's going to say they did -- but why didn't the Minister not have the consultations that she said she was going to have to obtain these alternatives and options, the information that would help us make informed, reasonable and rational decisions in the best interest of the people? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SANDY LEE: The fact is there is a lot of information to make informed, rational, logical decisions about where we should go with this program on behalf of all the people who need our attention with this program. Mr. Speaker, I know the Member is referring to the public working group. In fact, they asked for more information about the program. Exactly who does it serve? What is the background of the people that access this program? What would it mean in many different ways? So they asked for more detailed information before they put any input in, so we presented that information to the group and the group responded to the material we presented. Thank you.

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

MR. ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again no references to alternatives and options, the thing that is important to make a healthy, rational and reasonable decision. Since I can't get an answer there, I'm going to ask a different question.

In my Member's statement from the quote that I read, the individual said the process that we're going through now does not allow the GNWT to change its policy to accommodate the discussions and recommendations arrived at as a result of these consultations with the affected people and stakeholders prior to the stated implementation date. We've said since she announced the start date of this new policy, it's not enough time to consider some alternatives and make changes. Sounds like they've already got their plan decided to implement what they want. Why can't we push the date back a little bit so we have an opportunity to put in some of these alternatives or at least consider them reasonably? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SANDY LEE: The constituent that he mentioned, I have the copy of that e-mail too. That

e-mail was written before we had all the details that we posted on the website just yesterday. That participant was part of the stakeholders group which did not have all of the income data and who would benefit or not. This is an evolving process, Mr. Speaker. The public hearings started today. That's an opportunity for people to give us feedback into what we are presenting.

Mr. Speaker, the Member keeps saying where are the alternatives. I'd be happy to hear from him about what alternatives that he wants us to consider, because I believe the information we have gives a really good point for discussion. Thank you

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

QUESTION 91-16(5):
PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to follow up on some of my colleagues' questions who have been questioning the Minister of Health and Social Services to the proposed changes to supplementary health. The interesting thing for me, I was at the briefing on Tuesday and the information provided was good information, but again, Mr. Speaker, with all the trouble that was caused last year, about a year ago, just over a year ago and the issue is back before us again, I don't understand why it took that long to get that level of detailed information in front of the Standing Committee on Social Programs. That information, Mr. Speaker, should have been there a long time ago.

Mrs. Groenewegen was asking questions about what research the Department of Health and Social Services has done on the impact of these changes, what impact this proposed change would have on seniors here in our Territory and how many of them would actually pack their bags and leave the Northwest Territories as a direct result of these proposed changes to supplementary health benefits. Many of our residents are approaching retirement age as well and I'm not interested in grandfathering anybody. I think people who have paid taxes and raised families here in the Northwest Territories deserve and have every right to the same benefits that people enjoy today. I'd like to ask the Minister that question: what research was done?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. The honourable Minister responsible for Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

HON. SANDY LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that question has come up: has the department looked at what impact this will have in

terms of people wanting to leave. I have two direct answers to that. One is that we have no reason to believe that anything we are doing here would encourage anybody to leave the North because our program is as good, if not better, than what's available anywhere else. So our supp health benefits are still a robust one and the fact is all across the country, except for Nunavut, all extended health benefits are income tested. Not only are they income tested, some of them are means tested, which means they look at more than just the income. In some places it's asset tested, which we are not proposing to do at all. In Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and other jurisdictions, their income threshold is less than \$25,000 gross. We're talking about a program that you still have access to even if you make \$200,000 a year. So we have no reason to believe that anybody would leave.

Now, why can't you come up with a dollar? That's the same question as if somebody could tell me if I'm going to get sick tomorrow. I do not know what my health care cost is going to be to my government because we cannot project people's health expenses. To ask that, the Member has to know that's an impossible thing to answer.

MR. RAMSAY: The Minister knows full well, she's the chair of the Strategic Initiatives Committee on the Cost of Living. She knows full well that it's not a fair comparison to compare the cost of living here in the Northwest Territories to that of southern jurisdictions where, I might add, many people choose to retire in the South. Somebody has to protect the social fabric of our communities and keep families together and keep seniors in the North. I'd like to again ask the Minister how come a survey hasn't been conducted with the seniors in the Northwest Territories to ask them if proposed changes to the Supplementary Health Benefits Program would result in them leaving the Northwest Territories. Like I said, when they leave, that affects the social fabric of our communities. We need to keep families together.

I really think the Minister has to address that concern and the \$22,000 that the government gets in transfer payments for every person we have on the ground here in the Northwest Territories. That would be gone with them as well.

HON. SANDY LEE: Obviously I disagree with the Member's position on that. The fact is the cost of living issue for everyone in the North is important to this government. It's also important that we continue to provide a robust Extended Health Benefits Program to our residents. What we are trying to do is to expand the coverage to those who do not have it right now, who are experiencing cost of living issues, as well as anybody else. So we are proposing an income as a criterion to consider and we are open to listen to our residents through this

public hearing process about what they think of this and what other information they would like us to consider. We are open to listen to our residents through this public hearing process about what they think of this and what other information they would like us to consider.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The time for question period has expired; however, I will allow the Member a supplementary question. Mr. Ramsay.

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have to have some type of competitive advantage here in the Northwest Territories to maintain our population base, especially for senior citizens. I'd like to ask the Minister if she can explain to me how she feels that this proposed change to supplementary health is fair when it is a redistribution. She talks about it herself. She says there are going to be winners. Who are the losers?

HON. SANDY LEE: Under this proposal, if you go to the information that we have on the website, you would have to make \$400,000 net income, that's line 236 in federal income tax, you would have to make \$400,000 before you have to pay 100 percent of glasses, \$1,000 dental benefits, and 100 percent of your prescription drugs. You would have to make \$150,000 before you start making some contribution. That is being competitive. I would challenge any other government in the land who would pay for thousand dollar dental fees and glasses without a means test when you're making \$200,000-plus.

The Member should support this proposal where we are going to provide access to children and working families right now who do not have that. I would argue that somebody making \$70,000 a year could benefit from a \$1,000 dental benefit for each of their children before somebody who's making \$200,000 to \$400,000 that they get dental benefits just because they're of a certain age. I do believe that it's really important for the seniors out there to know that their benefits will be covered. There are no losers here because we are just asking people who can afford to pay to start contributing.

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

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a government we're spending hundreds of thousands of dollars by the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment, and I thank him for the initiatives that the government's started on trying to attract and retain people here in the Northwest Territories. The government knows how important it is to have people stay here in the Northwest Territories. Like I said earlier, it's \$22,000 per person.

I'd like to ask the Minister again, I didn't really hear it, she said there are no losers. When there are winners there are losers. Can the Minister stand up

in this House today and tell the people of the Northwest Territories who is going to lose under her proposed initiative?

HON. SANDY LEE: As the Member for Hay River South and many here know, we know that we have a very good health care program in the Northwest Territories. I honestly don't believe that somebody... Mr. Speaker, making a public decision and doing the right thing you have to look at things as a total package. We have 2,000 people who will benefit by having access to these programs. Remember, I think people should know, even for other seniors programs like the rental subsidy or fuel subsidy, the day care subsidy, a lot of other government programs are income tested. This is not the first program that would try to do that. Really it is a very fair and objective way to do it.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. Item 9, written questions. Item 10, returns to written questions. Mr. Clerk.

Returns to Written Questions

WRITTEN QUESTION 4-16(5): PHYSIOTHERAPY AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Mercer): Mr. Speaker, I have a return to written question asked by Mr. Hawkins on March 4, 2010, regarding physiotherapy (PT) and occupational therapy (OT).

PT and OT services are provided to community clients through inpatient, travel and outpatient services. The Stanton Territorial Health Authority (STHA) is responsible for providing services through travelling clinics to the Tlicho, Deh Cho and Yellowknife health and social services authorities. The Beaufort-Delta Health and Social Services Authority (BDHSSA) is likewise responsible for the Beaufort-Delta and Sahtu communities. The Hay River and Fort Smith health and social services authorities each offer PT/OT services through their respective hospitals. Service to communities is also provided through PT/OT outpatient clinics within Stanton Territorial Hospital (STH).

Later today, at the appropriate time, I will table the following:

- a list of visits to communities by the authorities in the 2008-2009 fiscal year;
- a list of attendances to the outpatient clinic at STH by community for the same time frame; and
- a list detailing the number of people on a waitlist for PT/OT services as of January 1, 2010.

Rehabilitation services are not an insured service under the Canada Health Act. PT/OT services are listed by a variety of factors that include: staffing

shortages; difficulties coordinating schedules with community health centres; the frequency of missed appointments; weather delays and cancellations for staff travel; budget restrictions; and the amount of time taken for preparation and follow-up for clients. Where applicable, third-party insurers, such as the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission or the federal government's Non-Insured Health Benefits, also dictate the frequency and type of services and/or equipment available.

STHA has an agreement in place with Nunavut. Between April 1, 2007, and August 2009, STHA billed Nunavut \$146,000 for PT/OT services, of which there is still \$34,881 outstanding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

RETURN TO WRITTEN QUESTION 5-16(5): WATER AND SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Mr. Speaker, I have a return to written question asked by Ms. Bisaro on March 4, 2010, on water and sewer infrastructure funding.

Specifically, the Member asked for a summary of emergency funds available from the GNWT to assist residents with costs related to an extensive infrastructure failure, and information on the redistribution of GNWT water and sewer funding to NWT communities, including funds for the City of Yellowknife for future fiscal years 2011-2012 through 2014-2015.

Municipal and Community Affairs does not offer emergency funding to residents. The department provides annual funding to community governments for infrastructure repair and replacement through the Community Public Infrastructure Funding Policy. Community governments may also utilize federal infrastructure allocations, such as gas tax funding, to replace water and sewer infrastructure on lands owned by the municipal government.

Funding is available to community governments under the department's Extraordinary Funding Policy which provides assistance for events beyond what a reasonable and prudent community government would plan for. Such funding will only be considered in situations where assistance is required to maintain a minimum level of community government services or to address regulatory requirements on an emergency basis.

The department is not aware of any other GNWT emergency funding that may be available to help residents respond to infrastructure failures on privately held lands.

The Member asked for information on the redistribution of GNWT water and sewer funding to NWT communities, including funds for the City of Yellowknife, for future fiscal years 2011-2012 through 2014-2015. The department has not undertaken a redistribution of water and sewer

funding. Later, at the appropriate time, I will table an excerpt from MACA Update 2009 that shows the projected community-by-community distribution of water and sewer funding for the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 fiscal years.

Funding currently provided to communities through MACA's Water and Sewer Funding Policy is limited to the ongoing operations and maintenance of providing water and sewer services. As the Member is aware, Yellowknife does not receive water and sewer funding because the city has a sufficient volume of users to raise adequate revenues to cover the cost of operating its water and sewer program. Other community governments in the NWT do not have a sufficient population base to raise the revenue required to fully cover the operational costs of providing water and sewer services to residents. The funding provided by MACA is to provide for the gap between what community governments can raise through own-source revenue and the cost of water and sewer operations.

All NWT communities receive community public infrastructure funding which may be used to address the capital replacement costs associated with water and sewer systems. Annually, the City of Yellowknife receives \$2.2 million in capital infrastructure funding from the GNWT.

The department is committed to working with the City of Yellowknife to explore all available funding sources that may help Northland Trailer Park address their infrastructure deficiencies. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**RETURN TO WRITTEN QUESTION 6-16(5):
IMPLEMENTATION OF A RESIDENTIAL
SCHOOL AFTERMATH ADVISOR**

Mr. Speaker, I have a return to written question asked by Mr. Yakeleya on March 4, 2010, regarding the implementation of a residential school aftermath advisor.

Mr. Yakeleya asked for an explanation as to why the government has not established the position of a residential school aftermath advisor and what such a full-time position, if it played a role similar to the special advisor to the Minister responsible for the Status of Women position, would cost.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT remains confident that rather than receiving advice from a single staff advisor, the GNWT's best option for contribution to this important work is through the NWT Interagency Residential Schools Committee where representatives from both levels of government, NWT aboriginal communities and committed individuals work together on behalf of residential school survivors. Senior staff from several GNWT departments participate through the interagency committee and the GNWT is very interested in any

proposals the committee might offer with regard to how the GNWT's policies and services could better address issues relating to the impact of the residential school system on northern people, as well as any particular concerns the committee may have with the delivery of GNWT programs as they relate to the committee's mandate.

With regard to the second part of Mr. Yakeleya question, the special advisor to the Minister responsible for the Status of Women position is rated at pay grid 6 with a salary range of \$95,006 to \$136,734. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Item 11, replies to opening address. Item 12, petitions. Item 13, reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 14, tabling of documents. The honourable Minister responsible for Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

Tabling of Documents

**TABLED DOCUMENT 16-16(5):
LIST OF VISITS TO COMMUNITIES BY
AUTHORITIES IN 2008-2009**

HON. SANDY LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three documents to table. List of visits to communities in 2008-2009 by physiotherapists and occupational therapists.

**TABLED DOCUMENT 17-16(5):
LIST OF ATTENDEES TO THE OUTPATIENT
CLINIC AT STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL
FOR 2008-2009**

List of attendees to the outpatient clinic by community in 2008-2009.

**TABLED DOCUMENT 18-16(5):
LIST OF NUMBER OF PEOPLE ON WAIT LIST
FOR PHYSIOTHERAPY AND OCCUPATIONAL
THERAPY SERVICES, JANUARY 1, 2010**

List of number of people on waitlist for physiotherapy and occupational therapy services as of January 1, 2010.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Minister responsible for Municipal and Community Affairs, Mr. Robert McLeod.

**TABLED DOCUMENT 19-16(5):
WATER AND SEWER SERVICES FUNDING**

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to my Return to Written Question 5-16(5), I wish to table the following document entitled Water and Sewer Services Funding.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Hawkins.

TABLED DOCUMENT 20-16(5):
RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF YELLOWKNIFE
MUNICIPAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
REGARDING USE OF COMMUNICATIONS
DEVICES WHILE DRIVING

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a motion done by the Municipal Services Committee of the City of Yellowknife. It's a resolution regarding the use of communication devices while driving. The resolution is to be forwarded to the NWT Association of Communities. It speaks to the concern of this issue.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Item 15, notices of motion. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

Notices of Motion

MOTION 6-16(5):
EXTENDED ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE
TO MAY 11, 2010

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that on Monday, March 29, 2010, I will move the following motion: I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Yellowknife South, that, notwithstanding Rule 4, when this House adjourns on Thursday, March 25, 2010, it shall be adjourned until Tuesday, May 11, 2010; and further, that any time prior to May 11, 2010, if the Speaker is satisfied, after consultation with the Executive Council and Members of the Legislative Assembly, that the public interest requires that the House should meet at an earlier time during the adjournment, the Speaker may give notice and thereupon the House shall meet at the time stated in such notice and shall transact its business as it has been duly adjourned to that time.

At the appropriate time I will be seeking unanimous consent to deal with this motion today.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. Item 16, notices of motion for first reading of bills. Item 17, motions. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek unanimous consent to deal with the motion I gave notice of earlier today.

---Unanimous consent granted.

Motions

MOTION 6-16(5):
EXTENDED ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE
TO MAY 11, 2010,
CARRIED

MS. BISARO: I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Yellowknife South, that, notwithstanding Rule 4, when this House adjourns

on Thursday, March 25, 2010, it shall be adjourned until Tuesday, May 11, 2010;

AND FURTHER, that any time prior to May 11, 2010, if the Speaker is satisfied, after consultation with the Executive Council and Members of the Legislative Assembly, that the public interest requires that the House should meet at an earlier time during the adjournment, the Speaker may give notice and thereupon the House shall meet at the time stated in such notice and shall transact its business as it has been duly adjourned to that time.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. A motion is on the floor. The motion is in order. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called.

---Carried

Item 18, first reading of bills. Item 19, second reading of bills. The honourable Premier, Mr. Roland.

Second Reading of Bills

BILL 6:
SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT
(INFRASTRUCTURE EXPENDITURES),
NO. 2, 2010-2011

HON. FLOYD ROLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Deh Cho, that Bill 6, Supplementary Appropriation Act (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 2, 2010-2011, be read for the second time.

This bill makes supplementary appropriations for infrastructure expenditures for the Government of the Northwest Territories for the 2010-2011 fiscal year.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Roland. A motion is on the floor. The motion is in order. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to speak to the principle of the bill. It's not a bill that I can see myself supporting for a number of reasons. I think first and foremost I'm not convinced that the decisions that the government has made pertaining to the Deh Cho Bridge Project after the issues with the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation came to light and we've taken over the project. The first thing the government did was take the recommendation of the former project managers there to go to a sole-source contract with Ruskin. My opinion is that was the wrong thing to do. I do believe we should have gone to the marketplace on this. That's my firm belief. I don't understand how the government could get into another sole-source negotiated contract arrangement with one company, not fully understanding or knowing where

the project's been and the audit, in my mind, should have been done before the government went out to the marketplace for what would have been a proper tendering process so that we could ensure for the public in the Northwest Territories that we were in fact getting the best price for the completion of this massive piece of public infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I also don't believe that the project is going to be completed by November of 2011, like the government seems to think that it's going to be completed by. Timing was a big issue when it came to the decision to negotiate that deal with Ruskin for the completion of that bridge. My belief is, again, this will not happen.

I also do not believe for one second that the final price tag on this bridge is going to be \$182 million. I believe it's going to be much higher than that.

I understand and I appreciate the position that Members are in and this government is now in. It is between a rock and a hard place, Mr. Speaker, make no mistake about that. We are in a very, very difficult position. But again, Mr. Speaker, on principle -- and that's why I'm voting against Bill 6 -- I cannot support this, because I do not believe that the right decisions were made at the appropriate time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this bill asks us to approve spending \$165 million on the Deh Cho Bridge. It's a yes or a no decision so it should be seen as a simple one, but as we heard through our discussions on Tuesday afternoon, it's anything but simple. There are many, many questions from Regular Members which remain as yet unanswered, not because Ministers don't want to provide the answers but because they can't. They don't have the information to pass on to us. Negotiations aren't finalized so the status of the Bridge Corp is unknown. Deficiency tests aren't completed so the quality of the work to date is unknown. Costs for the bridge after completion can't be clearly identified because the date is not available. Impacts on future budgets can't be determined because, well, because it's the future and it's uncertain.

I am not happy that I am now forced into this decision. There is only one path for me to walk down. There is only one option open to me for consideration. There is no opportunity to slow down the decision and to take the time to conscientiously consider the ramifications of the vote. I've harboured doubts and concerns about this project from the time I entered this House, and I am dismayed that those concerns have unfortunately proven to be valid. I feel like I've been backed into a corner and have been asked to choose the lesser of two evils. A yes vote means we take on this huge project and all the responsibilities and liabilities that

that entails in both a management and a financial sense. A no vote means the project probably dies and that result will cost us as much as if we carry on the project to complete.

But all that said, I do support construction of the Deh Cho Bridge. It will be a marvellous piece of infrastructure once it's completed. So I look forward to project updates on a frequent and regular basis. I hope our new management team will bring this project in on time and on budget. I look forward to the results of an audit of the project and the implementations of recommendations from the audit, and I look forward to the establishment of protocols to govern the actions of this and future Assemblies in the months leading up to any territorial election. I will be voting in favour of this bill for two reasons: because we can't turn back and it's the right thing to do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. The honourable Member for Sahtu, Mr. Yakeleya.

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I, too, will be supporting the bill because I think we were faced with a challenge that certainly none of us wanted to be in, because when we first had some discussions with the Deh Cho Bridge it looked like it was good plan to go with and plans that probably would have worked out very well for the Deh Cho Corporation that involved the community of Fort Providence, members in Fort Providence, the Metis and the First Nation, the band.

Mr. Speaker, when things have gone astray or offside there, we had to step in in terms of how do we keep this megaproject on the go here. I think that the government has shown that there are some things that certainly needed to happen in terms of not pulling the piers out of the water here, so to speak. We had to do some things that are not very popular with some of the Members here in terms of how we go forward.

However, I'm saying this in terms of the principle, that this is a project that is only \$182 million, in terms of when you look at the scope of us building and taking on... We talk about the Mackenzie Valley Highway, \$1.8 billion. When you look at that in comparison to what we have here in the Northwest Territories, this certainly, and Members have given some really good questions to the government in terms of how this project is being put forward, that we take this as a real learning experience in terms of how do we go forward with the megaprojects.

So the point that I want to go is there are other bridges to be built in the Northwest Territories. This is one that takes a lot of energy. We've got some other major projects that we want to look at, so I hope that the government is paying close attention in terms of where the issues are with the Members in this House here in terms of putting major

infrastructure in the Northwest Territories and we go forward again. So I have no problems in terms of supporting this bill at this time.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Bromley.

MR. BROMLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I will reluctantly be supporting this supplementary appropriation bill. It's really more expensive not to proceed with this than to proceed, which is a sad state of affairs. This situation speaks to some serious management questions that beg for investigation and for some attention to make sure that any corrections that are needed are realized. I think the political decisions that got us into this situation also require further investigation and an objective look, again with an eye to plugging any process gaps that exist, and we know they do.

Clearly, there are major budget implications for the next decade or more as this project consumes a third of our debt room. I guess, to wrap it up, Mr. Speaker, in a brief sentence: this is a very sad situation and it can only be resolved through the long term. I think we need to bite the bullet here, and on that basis I will support the bill. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also will be supporting the bill as it is brought forward today. I, along with colleagues, do so with mixed emotions, with mixed feelings about this. I hope we've learned some very good lessons from this approach that we took to this capital project. I think that once we decided to try to bring this project to reality through a way that could be described as -- I don't know what the word is -- through the back door, for sure. This was not through the front door. This came to us through the back door and the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation, you know, the capacity to deal with a project of this magnitude was not tested and tried. I feel sorry for the efforts that they made and were not successful in seeing this project to completion. I think there are a lot of regrets all around on this.

I hope that the redeeming reality will be that we will have a bridge -- and I said this, I'm repeating myself now, I said this earlier -- but I hope that we will have a piece of territorial infrastructure that will serve the people of the Northwest Territories for many, many years. I hope that the concerns about deficiencies or defects are just small things that can be dealt with and addressed and that will not, going forward, affect the usefulness and the serviceability of this project.

I think that as the economy is returning to a better standing and inflation will rise and interest rates will go back to higher rates and so on, I am hopeful today that we will look back on this and say that

although the process seemed flawed, that what we end up with at the end of the day is a piece of infrastructure that we can use and be proud of and that we will look back and say that it was a good and worthwhile investment. So I will be supporting the motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will be supporting the bill, reluctantly, but I think that we have no other choice in the matter. Regardless, we would have to pay \$165 million over 35 years. It is just that we are going to basically have to refinance this thing in a different manner and we will get the major piece of infrastructure completed. I think also that we do have to learn from this event and I think, if anything, in some cases, hopefully that we do get the answer back from the federal Finance Minister hopefully sooner than later so we have an answer by the time we next sit. I think it is important that we do get that commitment in writing from the federal government so that we can get some comfort that it is not going to have a direct implication on our borrowing limit.

I think also in regards to my colleagues in other regions in the Territories, we also would like to be able to look at some other infrastructure, regardless if it is the Peel River Bridge or the Liard or the Bear. I think that we have to be respectful of the groups in Fort Providence who are taking on this challenge and also that doing the work that basically will set the precedent going forward. Yes, it didn't turn out the way that we would like, but I think that they also realize that there are obstacles in doing anything new.

I think the problem that we now realize is that there is a way to build infrastructure in the Northwest Territories. If that means the cost of the operational cost of the ferry operations, the ice roads, the maintenance costs and a couple of million dollars of public investment, we can build infrastructure over a period of time, pay it out over 35 or 40 years. I think that is the approach we are going to have to consider going forward.

My colleague from the Sahtu states that we do have some major infrastructure we are considering such as the Mackenzie Highway, which is a \$1.8 billion project. I think that is going to be a bigger challenge from a territorial perspective and also from the logistical challenges from that major project. I think that with the pipeline and that, we have a lot of big projects on the rise.

With that, I will be supporting the motion. Again, with reluctance but, more importantly, with some comfort from the federal Finance Minister and something in writing that states that we will be able to avoid having this on our books by way of our borrowing limit. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. To the principle of the bill.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called.

---Carried

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters: Tabled Document 4-16(5), Executive Summary of the Report of the Joint Review Panel for the Mackenzie Gas Project, with Mr. Krutko in the Chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): At this time I will call for a short break before we proceed in Committee of the Whole.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): I would like to call Committee of the Whole back to order for consideration of Tabled Document 4-16(5). What is the wish of the committee? Mr. Abernethy.

MR. ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that we report progress.

---Carried

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Krutko): I will now rise and report progress.

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. SPEAKER: Can I have the report of Committee of the Whole, please, Mr. Krutko.

MR. KRUTKO: Mr. Speaker, your committee would like to report progress. Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of Committee of the Whole be concurred with.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. A motion is on the floor. Do we have a seconder? The honourable Member for Monfwi, Mr. Lafferty.

---Carried

Third reading of bills. The honourable Premier, Mr. Roland.

Third Reading of Bills

BILL 6:
SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ACT
(INFRASTRUCTURE EXPENDITURES), NO. 2,
2010-2011

HON. FLOYD ROLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Deh Cho, that Bill 6, Supplementary Appropriation Act (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 2, 2010-2011, be read for the third time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Roland. The motion is on the floor. The motion is in order. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question is being called.

---Carried

Mr. Clerk, would you ascertain whether the Commissioner, Anthony W.J. Whitford, is prepared to enter the Chamber to assent to bills.

ASSENT TO BILLS

COMMISSIONER OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES (Hon. Tony Whitford): Monsieur le president, monsieur le premier ministre, messieurs et Mesdames les deputes, friends... It's short.

---Laughter

I wasn't expecting to do this again, but it is indeed an unexpected pleasure to be back in your company this afternoon.

As Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, I am pleased to assent to the following bill:

- Bill 6, Supplementary Appropriation Act (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 2, 2010-2011

Thank you, merci, quanami, mahsi cho.

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Clerk, orders of the day.

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Mercer): Orders of the day for Tuesday, May 11, 2010, at 1:30 p.m.:

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Acknowledgements
7. Oral Questions
8. Written Questions
9. Returns to Written Questions
10. Replies to Opening Address
11. 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

19. Second Reading of Bills
20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Tabled Document 4-16(5), Executive Summary of the Report of the Joint Review Panel for the Mackenzie Gas Project
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 Tuesday, May 11, 2010, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 3:59 p.m.