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The Honourable Jackson Lafferty, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Thursday, February 2, 2017

Members Present

Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Blake, Hon. Caroline Cochrane, Hon. Jackson Lafferty, Hon. Bob McLeod, Hon. Robert McLeod, Hon. Alfred Moses, Mr. Nadli, Mr. Nakimayak, Mr. McNeely, Mr. O'Reilly, Hon. Wally Schumann, Hon. Louis Sebert, Mr. Simpson, Mr. Testart, Mr. Thompson, Mr. Vanthuyne

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Jackson Lafferty): Good afternoon, Members. Item 2, Ministers' statements. Item 3, Members' statements. Member for Yellowknife North.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON BENEFITS OF TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

MR. VANTHUYNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we live in a huge territory with a small population spread out over a huge vastness of land and water, so it's important that we develop our transportation infrastructure, and it's why we committed to three major road systems in our mandate.

Mr. Speaker, other mandate commitments include lowering the cost of living, more educational opportunities, more affordable housing, support for small business, and diversifying the economy. So should we spend money on roads, or on these other things? My answer, Mr. Speaker, is that roads will support these other important goals. Building roads will create jobs, and, yes, when the road is built, some jobs will end; but let's think about what comes after that, and how we can support communities.

We can plan for economic investment to support measured, manageable growth of local economies. We can help small businesses start up and grow as they gain affordable access to suppliers and markets. We can help them be ready for an abundance of new opportunities. We can plan for supports to help communities through social changes. We can ready families for better access to healthcare services, more educational opportunities, and access to lower-priced goods and services.

Families need to be able to connect and stay in touch. Communities like Whati understand the importance of inclusion and accessibility. Cultural gatherings, community festivals, and sporting

events are important elements of northern community and culture, which will be more easily available with better road connections.

Mr. Speaker, as long as people have to fly everything in or wait for the winter road, it will be harder to build new and affordable housing. Business start-ups will face tougher challenges or may not happen at all. Agriculture projects will be harder to achieve, and food security more distant. Everything from groceries to construction materials, clothing to books, vehicles, and fuel will cost more. Not to mention that winter roads are at increasing risk from climate change impacts every year, with increasing costs to build them and shorter seasons to use them. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

MR. VANTHUYNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, colleagues. We know for a fact that all these necessities are cheaper and more readily accessible in communities with permanent roads. Building roads generates jobs, boosts the economy, and creates opportunity. In our mandate, we committed to taking advantage of federal investments and industry partnerships to improve infrastructure. Roads don't exist in isolation. They will contribute to other mandate goals — lowering the cost of living, raising standards of living, and connecting communities.

Mr. Speaker, for me it's not a choice of having roads or having other things. It's recognition that roads, as part of our overall direction, will help us move forward toward fully achieving our mandate. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Members' statements. Member for Hay River North.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON REVITALIZATION OF THE COMMERCIAL FISHING INDUSTRY

MR. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two days ago I spoke about the commercial fishing industry. The proposed budget released yesterday means that I'm talking about it again. Noticeably absent from that budget is the \$1.4 million dollars that had been set aside for the last two years to revitalize the commercial fishing industry and to build the fish

processing plant in Hay River. The Minister told me Tuesday in this House that there were plans for that money, but now we see that it's not included in the budget at all.

Does this mean that revitalizing the fishery is no longer a priority of the government? Or are they just giving that particular line item a rest for a year? I don't know why we need it. It hasn't been doing anything for two years. Whatever it means, the honourable Minister of ITI and the MLA from Hay River owes an explanation to its community, and especially to the fishermen who have partnered with ITI in this revitalization strategy and have been working hard and doing their part.

If the department needs ideas on how to spend the money, I've got plenty: we need strategic investments to help bring back the wintery fishery; we can start providing fishermen with affordable financing, which is hard to come by in their profession; we need to provide administrative support so that the fishermen can get out on the lake and fish, not write proposals and respond to e-mails; and so we can end the subsidies and let the commercial fishery thrive on its own, we need to work with the fishermen to develop markets so they can sell their products once they decide to leave Freshwater.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very confused. I sought and was given assurances from the department during the business planning sessions for this budget and the capital budget that the money would be carried over into 2017-2018. One way to avoid these types of miscommunications might be to make some internal reorganization in ITI. I suggest moving the manager of Fisheries and Agriculture out of Yellowknife and into Hay River, the heart of the fishery and agriculture in the territory. The manager is responsible for developing, expanding, and setting the direction of these sectors and for consulting with industry organizations.

Mr. Speaker, the president of the NWT Fishermen's Federation didn't even know this position existed. How is that for consultation? If this position were in Hay River, where it logically should be, I'm confident that we would be much further along with the revitalization strategy. At the same time, we should probably also move the agricultural consultant position in that unit back to Hay River from Yellowknife, and while we're at it create a fisheries consultant position. I appreciate the great work of the ITI employees in the South Slave in regard to commercial fisheries, but if there are positions dedicated to a particular industry, they should be where the industries are. At the appropriate time, I'll have questions for the Minister of ITI. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Members' statements. Member for Kam Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON BENEFITS OF WHATI ALL-SEASON ROAD

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, today I rise in support of the Tlicho All-Season Road that will connect the community of Whati with the greater Northwest Territories. This is an important initiative for the growth and development of our future here in the Northwest Territories, and shows that this government is capable of working in partnership with many levels of governments, including Indigenous governments who have made the choice to ask for this important strategic investment.

People are very excited about this road, I think, across the territory and the potential that it represents for our communities, for our economy and again for our future. This will mean access to cheaper goods and more of them in this once isolated community. It means potential for developing hydroelectric resources and bringing cheaper power to the community, as well. It means opening up the door for increased mineral exploration in the region and finally getting a major mine that's been stalled in development off the ground and create jobs for the people we represent.

As you know, we've said often a job is the best possible thing we can do for our people to take the pressure off government spending and put money back into our communities, and this is an initiative that will help to deliver on those promises. It is a mandated commitment, and I'm very proud to see the work that's been done to date. I hope we can get more details from the government on exactly when we're going to start work on this important initiative and exactly who is paying for it, so I'll have questions for the Minister later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Members' statements. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON PASSING OF STEVEN TSETTA OF NDILO

MR. BEAULIEU: Marci Cho, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this has become convention for me today. I'm going to do another tribute today. [Translation] There is one man from the end of the island. I want to talk about that. [Translation ends] I would like to pay tribute to the late Steven Tsetta. He passed away [Translation] October 15 [Translation ends] at the age of 25.

Mr. Speaker, Steven was born in Edmonton on April 26, 1991. Steven lived in Ndilo and Yellowknife. He comes from a huge family, which

includes Tsettas, Bowles, Crapeaus, Laffertys, and Abels. He was a talented artist, computer graphics, math, and loved cooking. He tried everything when he cooked. He loved his traditional food, especially dryfish and drymeat. When he was younger, he would put bikes together for him and his friends.

Mr. Speaker, anyone who knew Steven knows his humorous nature. He loved his family and friends, and had so much respect for everyone he met. He had the kindest heart and showed it by helping in any way he could. He loved to help elders as much as he could, either walking them across the street or getting them a chair in a public event.

Mr. Speaker, Steven is survived by his mother, Terri Tsetta; father, Robert Bowles; his sisters Ashley and Joanne; brothers Leo and Jason; aunts Maryjane Dennis, Gina, Shirley Gerry, Cecil, Diane Mike; uncles Alfred, Peter, Leon, Paul, and Narcisse; nieces, nephews, and numerous cousins and friends.

Mr. Speaker, Steven is predeceased by his grandparents Berry and Celine Tsetta; uncles John, Noel, Joseph, Raymond, and Archie; his aunts Harriet, MaryAdele, Alice, and Adeline; also his cousin Leah.

Mr. Speaker, Steven will be sadly missed by his family and friends. He is a baby of his family, and we will miss his good, kind heart shown to all who knew him. He passed away so suddenly, so young. My deepest condolences go out to the family and friends. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Our condolences go out to family, as well. Members' statements. Member for Nahendeh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON FUNDRAISING EFFORTS TO SUPPORT SYRIAN REFUGEES

MR. THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, I would like to speak about a group of women from Fort Simpson who decided to do a flash fundraiser to raise money for Syrian refugees during the holiday season.

The idea started when one of the ladies saw a social media post on Facebook from the Compassion Collective, a group of authors in the United States who are raising money for the Syrian refugees.

After reading the post and expressing her desire to participate in some form of a Compassion Collective fundraiser, she began receiving posts and calls from a number of her family and friends who wanted to help out, as well. After a number of chats and conversations, the ladies agreed to the

idea of a coffeehouse and offering gift wrapping services to the participants.

The ladies thought, as a collective, they could do more. They started to plan and organize an event for December 22nd. As I have said in the past, many hands make a task seem less challenging and achievable.

Mr. Speaker, these ladies went into thinking collectively they could do more than one of them could contribute individually at this time of season. They understood that it was Christmastime and not everyone had a lot of money to spare, but if people who come to the event put in a small amount of money for a cup of coffee and a cinnamon bun, they could raise money and awareness for the cause.

I am proud to announce that the fundraisers drew a couple of vendors and a steady stream of people to the rec centre for the event. To help make this event even more successful, five youth volunteered their afternoon to help out these ladies. The group was fortunate to receive a couple of large cash donations and donations for the Northern and Unity convenience store. For the most part, the donations were loonies, toonies, five dollar and ten dollar bills.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to say they were able to raise \$1,400 for this charitable cause. What true Christmas spirit. In closing, I would like to quote Ellen Goodman, an author from this organization: "I have never been especially impressed by the heroics of people convinced that they are about to change the world. I am more awed by those who struggle to make one small difference."

Mr. Speaker, these ladies and youth did just that. I would like to ask my colleagues to please give them a big round of applause. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Members' statements. Member for Frame Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON GNWT POSITION ON CARBON PRICING

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. On December 9, 2016, our Premier signed on to the Pan Canadian Framework on Climate Change. This is a good thing, but as usual, it was done with no consultation with Regular Members as to what the GNWT position should be. As recently as July 21, 2016, our Premier was part of a Yukon government news release, "Northern premiers confirm united stance against carbon price." Our Premier was quoted as saying, "A national carbon pricing strategy could not be viable in the Northwest Territories unless it alleviates or compensates for the high cost of living and doing business in the North. Until there are economically viable

alternatives, carbon pricing mechanisms will not significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the Northwest Territories."

I would like to know what changed between July and December of last year and overcame the Premier's resistance to real action on climate change? One thing that did happen was an election in the Yukon, where a new government was elected on November 7th. Lucky for us here in the Northwest Territories, as this seems to have had some influence over our Premier's position.

What is next for us? Are we going to sit back and wait for the federal government to impose a federal carbon tax? Are we going to get our act together and design a carbon tax for the Northwest Territories that protects the remote communities and lower-income families and individuals? I see very little evidence that our Cabinet is doing anything with regard to a carbon tax. When I went to the public meeting on the Northwest Territories energy plan and climate change strategic framework in December, here in Yellowknife, there was no discussion of a carbon tax. Of course, this was before the Premier had signed on to the Pan Canadian Framework on Climate Change. What is going on?

By now, our government should have articulated a clear position that any carbon tax funds collected here should have no impact on our territorial formula funding arrangement, and that funds collected will be used to offset impacts on remote communities and low-income families and invested into renewable energy. By now, we should know what specific tools have been identified to offset impacts, including the tax system, and that there will be specific public tracking measures and targets for greenhouse gas reductions. Mr. Speaker, there are lots of questions on our flip-flop positioning, lack of consultation with Regular MLAs, and whether we will become leaders in climate change or continue to resist taking real action. I will have questions later today for our Premier. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Members' statements. Member for Sahtu.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON FISCAL AND ECONOMIC PRIORITIES

MR. MCNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to discuss or mention previous highlights. A number of events have occurred since our last November session. To highlight and to move on with a few: first of all, the Almod Diamonds presentation to have a polishing facility in Yellowknife was made. Secondly, the purchase of assets from NTCL will ensure deliveries to our Sahtu communities, being three of them. Thirdly,

the federal announcement on healthcare, infrastructure, and the all-season road to Canyon Creek project in the Sahtu, including the Whati road. In addition, Mr. Speaker, the recent announcement on the federal infrastructure in various communities, including Fort Smith, as well.

Mr. Speaker, from our continued attention, it is common knowledge that our physical position comes across with challenges and solid decisions in the process facing management.

Mr. Speaker, given this and our recent grade F by the CFIB, I look forward to a continuing process on how we can improve the administration of our systems. We should take into account, moving forward, we will take into consideration the certainty facing the attraction of investors. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Members' statements. Member for Deh Cho.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON PASSING OF MONIQUE PROVIDENCE OF K'AAGEE (KAKISA)

MR. NADLI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, wanted to take a moment to honour a late elder that passed away in Kakisa or K'aagee, the late Monique Providence. In my language. [English translation not provided.] Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. We offer our condolences to the family, as well. Members' statements. Member for Nunakput.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON RESOURCES FOR NUNAKPUT YOUTH

MR. NAKIMAYAK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're now about halfway into the Walk to Tuk Challenge, a territory-wide health initiative that encourages Northerners to team up with friends and family to conceptually walk from Fort Providence to Tuktoyaktuk. Even the Legislative Assembly is hosting a few teams, and I congratulate them.

As my fellow Northerners add up their walking, skiing, and jogging, trying to reach the 1,658 kilometre goal, I also want to ask you to consider that distance, consider what it means to be a small, remote community like Tuktoyaktuk or like the other communities of my riding of Nunakput, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, and Ulukhaktok. Imagine how different the life experience of growing up in a place your fellow Northerners understand to be so far away, both the benefits and the challenges, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, Nunakput residents, especially youth, can often feel isolated, and they face other unique challenges, too. For instance, this past October, children's evening programs at Paulatuk's Angik School were cancelled due to wolf sightings. That's not very common down south. Yet, at the same time, living in the North does provide very special opportunities for youth, provided adults and this government stand behind them as their representatives and supporters, Mr. Speaker. For example, last summer one of our Junior Canadian Rangers, Mr. Julian Green of Paulatuk, represented his community at the North American Leaders' Summit in Ottawa. Nunakput also regularly participates in traditional activities, going out on the land to hunt and learn from elders, like Ulukhaktok youth did for the muskox hunt this past December. The Inuvialuit Regional Corporation even delivers its reindeer harvesting program. We may sometimes feel isolated, but we also benefit greatly from living in the heart of our traditional territories.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear. All in all, I support the Walk to Tuk Challenge and its ability to bring Northerners together for fitness and fun during our long, dark winters. When it comes to our youth, I hope we can walk the distance together, following through on the mandate commitment to create opportunities for healthy lifestyles and community leadership for youth. Quyanainni, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Members' statements. Member for Mackenzie Delta.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON DISPOSAL OF CONDEMNED HOUSING UNITS

MR. BLAKE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in my riding, including the communities of Aklavik and Fort McPherson, residents have some hard questions for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation. In these communities, there are a number of old units that are empty, boarded up, and no one can live in them, but these units are still standing in the communities, even with residents pinned between long waiting lists for public housing and shortfalls in market rental availability.

I know that the Housing Corporation is hard at work on several new projects. Planned work on the new seniors' facility in Aklavik which was completed in Fort McPherson is a welcome sight, although there have been some delays. So is the pilot project to test singles' housing in Aklavik.

I'll be watching these projects closely, and I'm hopeful that it will lift some of the housing burden from our people. Even with this work, Mr. Speaker, it can be a bitter pill to swallow, to linger on a waiting list while empty, unliveable units fall further into disrepair. Although work may be taking place

behind the scenes, it's needed on the ground, too. The sooner the old units beyond repair can be disposed of, the sooner we can move forward to replace them and the sooner we can bring relief to our families, elders, and single people, all working hard to have a home of their own. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll have questions for the Minister later today.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Members' statements. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. BEAULIEU: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move item 11 up the orders of the day to now or number 4. Thank you.

---Unanimous consent granted

MR. SPEAKER: Item 11, replies to budget address. Member for Nahendeh.

Replies to Budget Address

MR. THOMPSON'S REPLY

MR. THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As my colleague from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh said yesterday in his reply to the Budget Address, he's one of the MLAs who represents small communities. I, too, represent small communities in my riding, and they face many challenges. Unfortunately, sometimes our concerns are not heard by Cabinet. I've said it before, and still firmly believe this.

Mr. Speaker, before I speak directly about the budget, I need to address one of the budget processes. The first issue is consensus government. On Thursday, we heard from the Premier that the budget is a product of consensus system. He went on to say we are doing business differently by strengthening consensus as one of our priorities.

When I read a summary of our system, it stressed that, compared to the party system, there is much more communication between Regular Members and Cabinet. All regulations, major policies, and proposed budgets pass through the Regular Members' standing committees before coming to the House. This gives Members a chance to make changes and put their fingerprints on initiatives before they're made public, unlike other systems. I'd like to add that, at the two consensus government meetings, 19 MLAs worked together for the benefit of all the residents of the NWT.

I understand that there are some very hard decisions to be made, and we elected the Cabinet to make them, but Ministers need to work with us all and not always take their direction from bureaucracy. To have true consensus government, we all need to be able to speak freely.

Unfortunately, with Cabinet solidarity, it does not happen a lot. The Ordinary MLAs can speak freely and vote as we feel we need to. It is very significant when there is great agreement among Regular Members as we have now against this budget. We agreed, not because we have to but because we are listening to our constituents and listen to each other in doing the right thing.

With automatic Cabinet solidarity on every single issue, I do not feel this is a true consensus government. This is my experience as a Member and in my past 24 years, witnessing and working with it across the North. Do not get me wrong. I truly believe in consensus government if it's done correctly. I realize consensus government can be and is difficult sometimes. It takes a lot to achieve the goal. Consensus government, if done right, is the truest and purest form of government. All 19 of us need to listen and hear each other to be able to move forward. Unfortunately, I cannot say this is happening right now.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not saying it's strictly Cabinet's fault or the Regular Members' fault. It's all our faults. We need to work better together. Mr. Speaker, lack of communication is a major challenge. It seems, as soon as we elected Cabinet, it became an "us against them" approach. Major decisions are made without informing us until after the fact. I understand that quick action is required, but we should be informed as soon as possible. It seems that the attitude of my colleagues across the Chamber is that my job is to be the riding's MLA and help out my constituents; just leave the oversight work to Cabinet and the bureaucracy. That oversight work is our duty, and we are doing and we'll continue to do it.

I've heard and listened to people say you need to come down the hall more and speak to the Cabinet Ministers to get business done. I've done this with some success, and often without success. In my previous job, communications were an important part of my job. This involved me making contact in person or by the phone to see how things were going; however, they were also encouraged to contact me at least once a month. This is how we got business done for our residents. I strongly encourage the Minister to try this approach with us, the Regular MLAs.

Mr. Speaker, when I looked at the history of this government and its budgets we always spend during the good times and cut or make corrections in the hard times. We need to do a better job. This constant ebb and flow approach isn't the way to do things. Regular Members have been working with the government to get our financial house in order. There have been a lot of reductions, cuts, and corrections we have agreed to with our colleagues on the other side; for example, the 2016-2017 Main

Estimates shows a reduction of about \$68 million. The Minister of Finance's 2016-17 Budget Address also stated: our target is \$150 million in savings or new revenues to establish a short-term cash surplus by the end of the 18th Assembly. This budget does the heavy lifting. We have identified \$53 million in expenditure reductions, or 3 per cent of the total operation budget, and are raising \$15 million in new revenues over four years. This combination, expenditure management and increased revenue, brings us to a total of \$68 million; 45 per cent of our target. In my books, this shows we are working with our colleagues.

On January 31, 2017, we heard the Premier say the budget process is always a balancing act. There are always more needs than there is money to meet them, and that there are always more wants on top of this. I have to partially agree with the Premier on this; there are needs versus wants in any budget. Last year we tried to remove cuts and reductions from the budget. This time around we tried to do something different. We spent countless hours looking at strategic planning we could recommend in these difficult times. We offered ideas and recommendations, recommending staff cuts of certain positions that would benefit the residents of NWT, what we recommended to only 1 per cent of the annual \$1.7 million budget.

Mr. Speaker, as we started reviewing our second set of business plans, the one for this budget, I thought about what we as the 19 MLAs were trying to achieve. I reviewed our mandate, the promises we made to the people of the Northwest Territories. The more I look back at the process, the more I realize that we as ordinary MLAs have a difference of opinion with Cabinet Ministers on what needs to be done.

If you look at their ideas for cuts or corrections, as they call them, they are things that need to be done so we can fund mega projects such as hydro expansion, all-weather roads or capital purchases, whereas we, Regular Members, want modest investment that will ultimately save the government money and still meet the priorities set out in our mandate.

Unfortunately, we have limited success in our negotiation with Cabinet. In fact, the Cabinet's counter-offers were what the bureaucracy in Cabinet thought we wanted to hear. As we were going back and forth through the process I felt like a hungry Oliver Twist asking: can we have more, sir? It was very frustrating. The typical reply from the Finance Minister was that you should not be using credit cards to pay your bills. Unfortunately, sometimes you must do that to get on with your life. It isn't an easy decision, but sometimes you need to borrow to get ahead. In fact, this is the decision the government has made since 2008. Short-term

borrowing is needed in the latter part of each fiscal year when the government's total annual spending is greater than revenue.

Why does this happen when the government has a surplus of \$100 million or more in the operation budget every year? The Fiscal Responsibility Policy requires that half the capital or infrastructure projects are funded from the surplus of the operation budget. So the \$100 million surplus is spent on capital programs, leaving only a modest supplementary reserve for operation emergencies.

Sometimes there's not enough money in the supplementary reserve to cover a big forest fire every year, for example. The resulting shortfall will be covered by short-term borrowing near the end of the year. There have been shortfalls like that every year since 2008, and they have added up. In the budget before us today, the government expects to borrow \$305 million through March 31, 2018. Keep in mind this is a short-term event that repeats each year. On April 1st, the next year's funding is allocated and there is no short-term borrowing until much later that year. This keeps the interest costs down. During our Assembly we have reduced the amount of short-term borrowing, but we will not be able to bring it to zero that quickly without the loss of critical, important positions and programs.

Mr. Speaker, I am the second person to speak on the budget, and I'm going to focus my comments on a few areas. This is not to say that other areas are not a concern, but with limited time available these are the concerns I will focus on today.

In my reply to last year's budget I recommended that we ask the public service to come up with some money-saving ideas. To date, nothing has happened, to my knowledge. What I understand is that senior bureaucrats were given a percentage of their department's budget that they needed to save. Off they went. Whatever they presented at Cabinet came to us after corrections from Cabinet.

I firmly believe that if public service was given the opportunity to make suggestions on ways to make the government more efficient, we would save millions of dollars. I look at cell phones, as an example. In my life as a government official I got a cell phone with unlimited texting and calling. Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, I was able to get a cell phone not on the government's plan, but by doing this I save \$30 a month compared to my colleagues and had a better plan that also saved the government money. If we have a thousand cell phones we could save \$360,000 a year. Just one idea; maybe it works, maybe it's not. It is something to look at, at least.

I believe that there are hundreds, maybe thousands, of ideas for saving money out there.

Another one is not wasting money at year end just because it's there to spend and you might not get it next year.

Mr. Speaker, in my time with the government I've seen departments begin amalgamation and splitting it up again, only to get back together again and splitting it up. My frustration is that the government says that this will save money in the long run, but the process does not make sense. I've heard that a zero-based review approach was used for the amalgamation, but in reality are just putting the departments together to save money.

When I asked about moving positions so that they can better serve the residents and save money I've been told it will be looked at in the future, but nothing happens. I encourage each department to take a zero-based budgeting approach; I believe this would help the departments get a true picture of costs and save money in the long run, plus it will make the government run more efficiently and effectively. We need to focus on form and function.

I have to say that my riding has agreed with implementing junior kindergarten from the beginning. Unfortunately, the plan to fully implement the program across the NWT this year will come at a cost to the schools I represent. They are looking at programs that we'll have to cut in order to offer the program. In one of the communities they may have to close down the high school program because they won't be able to offer a number of courses there, and have the students move to Fort Simpson. This is not good.

Mr. Speaker, we heard the Finance Minister say that the programs will be fully funded by the end of this term, so where is the funding for the junior kindergarten going to come from in the meantime? What does "fully funded" mean? In some of the smaller communities in my riding, they have one class with students in it from junior kindergarten right up to grade four or even grade nine. This is a challenge we are facing.

In the past two months I've had further questions for the Department of Education such as: has the department looked at other options in communities where existing options exist? Those might include current play-based care for four-year-olds that would be funded by the government and offered freely instead of school-based junior kindergarten. In other words, the funds follow the child.

Has the department looked at additional costs such as bussing, staffing, and for the child's safety that will come with this implementation? As well, we have some confusion about whether junior kindergarten will be voluntary for the school boards or whether they are required to offer it. Is it half-time, full-time, or voluntary? Mr. Speaker, there

are a lot of unanswered questions that need to be answered before we can fully implement this program. When we do implementation, it must be fully funded from the start.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to hear the government will increase funding to support employment opportunities for residents of the small communities. This is a great idea, but some communities cannot access it because they don't have the necessary funds to cover the 20 per cent required by the program. My idea may require some policy changes. Maybe we should look at providing the funding to community governments to create employment opportunities. This will get people off social income and help them feel better about themselves.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report on Department of Municipal and Community Affairs is very interesting. The department did not heed the Auditor General's caution that to fully address the issues raised by the audit the department must, one, take a proactive role with the community; fulfil its duties to ensure the proper delivery of essential services by communities in accordance with legislation, regulations, and policy; and, three, develop expert services in relationship-building as a core competency.

Mr. Speaker, it seems the department plans to cut a position is very much needed to help achieve this task. The argument that it can be done by somebody in Yellowknife or another regional centre is not a good one. This cut will hurt my riding and is out of line with the Auditor General's advice.

In the budget, the Minister talked about using lotteries to pay for the games that the NWT attends. It is frustrating because these games are the government's responsibility. It has either Sport North or the Aboriginal Sport Circle of the NWT to look after them. Now the government is looking to the lottery system to cover these costs. This is wrong. The government needs to fund these games and stop taking funds primarily earmarked for grass-root development. It is a sad day when we go down this road.

Mr. Speaker, I understand some positions need to be reduced or cut, but when you target certain positions at a community level, it goes against this Assembly's mandate and decentralization policy. Our mandate is to provide a strong relationship with community governments and stakeholders. Our mandate is to increase employment in small communities. Again, the bureaucracy in Cabinet seems to be out of touch with what is happening in the small communities and out of touch with our mandate.

I'm disappointed the government does not see the importance of fixing up the winter road or even a small section of the road. I'm talking about the Sambaa K'e road. We have approached the Minister of Transportation about this, but nothing has happened to date. The small investment we're asking for would help make the road safer and provide some needed employment to the residents of the community. Without this help, we can expect further problems like the recent case where patients were stuck on this road for six hours as they were going for an appointment.

Mr. Speaker, it should take a whole day's speech to address housing problems in my riding. However, with my limited time left, I will share an issue with you today. In one of my communities I represent, there are seven homes without running water, power, and heat except for a wood stove. They also have sewer challenges. These individuals live in third-world conditions, and we do nothing about it because they are in private homes. We tried and failed to get the government to put more money into housing. You can bet that, if any of my Cabinet colleagues lived in this situation, they would have the will to address this situation.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I visited my six communities and schools in my riding and talked about the budget process and how I was going to address it. All the community councils and constituents I spoke to agree that it is hard to stand up and face the government, but it needs to be done for our residents. There are some positive things in this budget, but there are too many issues that are still not addressed. There are also many damaging cuts that the Finance Minister did not wish to address or highlight in his speech. The devil, as the saying goes, is in the details. Therefore, I cannot support the budget as presented. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Replies to budget address, Member for Kam Lake.

MR. TESTART'S REPLY

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the honourable Members who have spoken before me, both today and tomorrow. Their comments are important to hear.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Finance delivered the much-anticipated 2017-2018 Budget Address, setting the stage for the coming weeks of budget deliberations in this House. It is a relief that this information is at long last made public so that our constituents can now know the full extent of what the government is proposing to do with their tax dollars and provide the programs and services they have come to expect.

As honourable Members of this House, we have spent many months in review of these budget plans through our standing committees and work as individual MLAs. This allows us to know exactly what is being proposed long before it is known publicly. While I appreciate the opportunity to work with the government, it can be frustrating to keep this vital information from the public at a time when government spending has become increasingly critical to meet the needs of our people.

Given our current economic conditions, it is no surprise to me that this budget is of considerable interest to Northerners. Time and time again, I am asked by constituents and supporters and everyday people: what is our government doing to support our economy, create jobs, and help support Northern families in their communities? These are not questions that should have to be asked. Rather, it should be abundantly clear to all exactly what measures this government is taking to ensure growth and prosperity for our territory.

Instead, we are constantly reminded by the ever-present mantra of the Minister of Finance that fiscal restraint and declining revenues are the priority for this government, and all the while paired with vivid metaphors of robbing grandchildren of their savings and falling off the edge of fiscal cliffs. Where is the ambitious plan to diversify our economy? Where is the plan to grow our population? Where is the plan to evolve into our new powers and responsibilities post-devolution? These major initiatives take major investment and should be the basis for spending priorities. Instead, we are shown that this government's fiscal strategy trumps the will of the majority of Members and the people of the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, when the 18th Assembly established its mandate, the government was adamant to include a fiscal context section that demanded severe curtailing of spending and a paramount focus on debt reduction for the life of this government. The fiscal context section was not accepted by the majority of honourable Members and ultimately removed from the mandate, and yet this did little to discourage the government to move away from its agenda of cuts and fiscal restraint.

During the first operations budget, we again saw a return to debt management and reductions as the driving force of the government's fiscal strategy that underpinned all of its spending commitments. This in fact led Members of the Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning to label this budget as an austerity budget motivated by a reduction target of \$150 million.

Mr. Speaker, after so many of these debates over the exact same issue of priorities and prioritizing debt management over investment in our mandate,

I would imagine that we would be seeing a change in approach and tone in today's budget. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and again we return to the same fundamental disagreement over what this government's financial priorities ought to be.

For me, Mr. Speaker, the priority is clear: invest in the mandate. Investing in the mandate is the key to delivering all of our shared priorities and on all the promises that we have made to the people of the Northwest Territories. The 2017 budget continues along the same path to generate a surplus at the end of this term. To accomplish this goal, this budget proposes a combination of staff reductions, departmental amalgamations, program sunsets, and massive increases of user fees in a variety of different areas. Government wants to cut 65 jobs, three departments, and \$33 million to start, promising to restore a surplus in three years.

This priority is wrong-headed, Mr. Speaker, at a time when our economy is in decline and we have yet to find new sources of economic opportunities that will replace the closure of our diamond mines.

Now is the time to invest and, yes, borrow if necessary. Diversifying the economy cannot happen without direct investment, and our government isn't going to find new mines without that same level of investment, and those mines certainly aren't going to build themselves. This is why our industry, our people, and our environment needs the support of robust spending from this government that will help move us forward. While we are doing some of the work in this budget, it is simply not enough, and we need to do more. Northerners would rather their grandchildren have a quality education and a high-paying job than a government with a healthy cash surplus. It's time that we focus on the people and not the bottom line of the government's books.

Mr. Speaker, I believe there is much efficiency to be had in government; unfortunately, these efficiencies aren't being readily sought. Instead, departments are being amalgamated to find cost savings instead of improving services to Northerners. An example of this can be found in the much-touted government service officers that are recognized as providing a vital service to our residents, and yet in this budget we only see \$950,000 for one additional position. That still leaves Yellowknife and the larger centres without access to this important service, and our people 50 per cent plus struggling to navigate bureaucratic red tape instead of getting the support they need for themselves and their families.

Why not instead move toward a service centre model for Yellowknife, Hay River, Inuvik, and the other larger communities where citizens have a one-stop shop to access government services?

Instead, Mr. Speaker, we have a variety of service officers scattered through the departments, and no one really seems to know how to access them. We can make better use of our resources through a centralization plan and expanding on the model that the GSOs have provided. Again, these amalgamations and cuts are not about greater efficiency; it's about reducing the cost and banking the cash for the future.

This budget also includes new sheriff positions, which, I, of course, welcome. It's a good step, but again, we are not looking towards efficiencies. We could be transferring all court security duties to the sheriffs and away from the RCMP. Our own peace officers can provide this duty as effectively as the RCMP and for less, and we could get our RCMP on the streets and improve the delivery of public safety to our residents. This is another area of efficiency that the government is not looking towards; instead, we are looking at the bare minimum of expansion through forced growth. Forced growth is not a plan for transformative change; it is a requirement of running a very large government. We need to do better, Mr. Speaker.

The climate change framework and future carbon tax is no clearer as a result of what we have seen in this budget. We've heard commitments from the Premier and the Minister of Finance that avoiding raising the cost of living and ensuring that we implement this tax in the right way that doesn't inadvertently harm the wellbeing of Northerners is the number one priority. So why do we not commit to putting this money from the tax back into the pockets of Northerners as tax relief or as an energy subsidy, or something along those lines?

Carbon taxes are not a new idea, Mr. Speaker, to this or any other government, and the lack of preparation for what was clearly an inevitable political reality speaks to a lack of vision for this government. Again and again we hear that this is a government of change, and yet we continue to do things the same way. We need to embrace these opportunities to invest in our people and, although shielding the public from increases to the cost of living is a feature of the rhetorical debate from the government in this House, the Cabinet has shown no restraint as it pursues massive fee increases to lands and transportation.

Although the Airport Improvement Plan has been sold as a way to unlock economic opportunity and develop much-needed air infrastructure, this poorly implemented plan is designed first and foremost to get an expensive piece of public infrastructure off the government's books and to have it paid for by consumers. There is no plan for an independent airport authority, and no immediate plan to invest in the much-needed infrastructure improvements that have been used to sell the plan. What is present is

an increase to fees, as much as 200 per cent in some cases, and a new improvement fee that will increase the cost of air travel by \$30 to \$40, twice as much for connecting flights from the North. Mr. Speaker, I do not know how this plan supports our goal of reducing the cost of living for Northerners.

The fees for Commissioner's and territorial land leases are seeing similar increases; as much as 100 per cent in some cases in one year. These fees should be increased to keep up with national standards, but not at such a break-neck pace that leaseholders cannot manage to keep up. We should have a phased-in approach that clearly takes into account the high cost of living for our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the work that my colleagues, the honourable Members of the Standing Committee of Priorities and Planning, have achieved in their review of these business plans and budget documents. Through these exercises we were able to develop our own priorities that moved this government in the right direction, aligning investment with the mandate and mitigating the most harmful of these cuts. These recommendations amount to less than 1 per cent of the total operating budget and are made in full recognition that our government does not have unlimited fiscal resources. I want to speak to these recommendations in light of the budget being made public.

Mr. Speaker, Northerners understand that a sound education system is crucial for the NWT. Our children deserve the best from our schools, and this government needs to ensure that we can continue to offer some of the best education in the world. I'm pleased to see that a commitment has been made to fully fund junior kindergarten by \$2.7 million, but this has not changed the amount of funding available in this budget. Furthermore, there are still many questions about how and when this funding will run out so our school boards and district education councils get the resources they need for our kids.

With so many unanswered questions, I would hope that this budget would clarify that and give certainty to parents and schools that they have the resources they need to ensure the same high-quality, inclusive education that the North has a right to be proud of. We need to do a better job of communicating these plans and communicating this commitment in more than words, but in real spending.

Mr. Speaker, the best way to reduce costs to this government and support the aspirations of Northerners is through a solid plan for jobs and growth. We've heard from this government that prioritizing major infrastructure spending to help

boost resource development opportunities and most of the reduction exercise is designed to support that infrastructure; but we can do more than just invest in mega projects, we can invest in entrepreneurs and other sectors of the economy.

The committee is proposing a \$1.2 million increase to the Support for Entrepreneurs and Economic Development Program. The SEED Program will ensure that new sources of capital are available for small businesses, start-up companies, prospectors, tourism operators, local governments, and more.

We also continue to call on a tax cut for small businesses, as promised by our mandate. We are also proposing to more than double the Mineral Incentive Program to a total investment of \$1 million. Mining is the life breath of our economy, and we need to show our support with more than words and seriously invest in development of new mines for the next generation of Northerners.

Growing our commercial fishery is a real opportunity to make best use of the best-quality fish in the world. Mr. Speaker, the committee is asking for this government to support this industry by increasing the industry freight support funding by \$225,000. This modest investment will help get our world-class product to market and keep our fishing industry competitive with the south.

Front-line business support for Northern companies, Indigenous-owned businesses, and entrepreneurs is provided by the Business Development and Investment Corporation, or BDIC. The committee stands opposed to cutting half a million dollars to BDIC, and further \$280,000 cuts to the community futures funding. These organizations and funds are crucial to supporting the growth of private sectors and communities, both large and small.

In the smaller communities, every job counts, Mr. Speaker, and our committee has a plan to support new jobs across the territory. Although we welcome the increase to the Small Community Employment Support Program to \$3 million, we are proposing additional funding of \$2 million for employment in the smaller communities, for a total investment of \$5 million. We are also proposing increasing the Community Access Program by \$700,000, allowing greater access to traditional use areas, better winter road conditions, and more work for these communities that do not enjoy year-long access. In addition, the committee is proposing a \$300,000 winter road for the community of Samba K'e.

Northerners want real action on climate change and cost of living. Energy retrofit programs offered through the Arctic Energy Alliance are funded by this government and are key in reducing the high cost of northern living and the high cost of running a

business in the North. We know that these programs are making a difference, and we are calling on this government to maintain \$750,000 of program funding and further enhance that funding by an additional \$750,000, for a total investment of \$1.5 million in energy retrofit programs. This will help Northerners lower their heating bills, reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, increase the value of their homes, and add more support in the fight against devastating climate change that is driving up our costs to the environment, our cost of living, and our traditional way of life for many people in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, Northerners continue to be dismayed by the high rates of suicide in their communities. It's devastating to lose a friend or family member to despair, and our government must do a better job of supporting mental health services and, in particular, mental health services for our young people. To this end, the committee has proposed \$500,000 in new funding for a youth in crisis and suicide prevention initiative and is calling on the government to develop a strong partnership with the federal government to bring more mobile crisis intervention teams to remote NWT communities.

Mr. Speaker, our aging population will place new pressure on the health system to provide long-term care and additional support. That is why the committee feels strongly that this government must place a high priority on new funding for aging in place. We are proposing \$1.5 million in new funding for homecare services. It is essential to assist seniors so they can age in their own homes. This funding would increase the number of homecare workers in all regions and approve transportation services for seniors and elders. We are also proposing to increase the CARE program through the Housing Corporation by an additional \$1.3 million, with funds specifically targeted to the repair and maintenance of seniors' homes, allowing our seniors to stay at home for longer. The avoided costs of long-term care will result in substantial long-term savings.

Mr. Speaker, that short list was just a number of the initiatives that the committee worked very diligently to provide. We do not seek to table our own budget, propose our own budget. We wanted to work with the government to pursue these initiatives and make substantial changes in the direction this government is going. Unfortunately, we have not been able to find common ground, apart from some issues. There are good things in this budget, though, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to address a few of those.

The new enhanced NWT Child Benefit and cost-of-living tax credit are steps in the right direction. These programs will put more money in the pockets of families that need help, lifting some 2,000

families out of poverty and bringing that investment back into their communities as they shop and find new opportunities for themselves. These are good things.

The Small Community Employment Plan, as I've already mentioned. This is a good thing, although, as I said, it does not go far enough. 911 service has been a concern for many Northerners for a very long time, and it's great to see that we're finally moving forward; however, it is on a partial cost recovery, which again we are seeing fee increase of 100 to 200 per cent in some area, and yet we can't expect 10 cents more for a 911 service, an essential safety service for Northerners.

The money for homelessness in Yellowknife is also a much-needed investment that I for one welcome. The Whati road and substantial support for policing services, in addition to some of the innovation programs, the unmanned aerial vehicle that will improve geomatics, collect some geomatic data, and we can pass it along to industry.

There are good things going on, Mr. Speaker, but these things are not happening in a robust and impactful way. They're not being communicated in a way that gives confidence. Again, every time we are given an opportunity to discuss our long-term commitments, it is always in the light of fiscal restraint and the danger that the entire system will experience a sudden shock that will see it collapse.

That does not provide confidence to anyone that we have the ability to build a strong economy and a stronger economy and a stronger territory, and it doesn't give hope to this side of the House that we can get anywhere in seeking greater investment in the mandate, which is why we have come to a position where the majority of Members in this House stand united in calling for change for the budget before it can be passed.

Nobody wants to be in this situation, Mr. Speaker. I certainly don't, and I know other honourable Members don't as well, but we are left with no choice but to place the needs of our people above the needs of a plan for debt management. We remain united in that front and we will continue to fight this fight until we see some changes to the mandate and some real investment in Northerners.

If we're going to save millions of dollars, let's use that today instead of for infrastructure projects that may not have the same impact for many years to come. We need that investment today. We need to get people off social support into their communities working, working for themselves and working for their people, and we believe we have created a set of initiatives that will help further move this government in that direction.

We are not asking for much; we're asking for less than 1 per cent, and I believe that we need to do this. Now is the time for investment, not the time to reduce our debt. Now is the time to invest in our people and make a real difference in the lives of Northerners. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Replies to budget address. There appear to be no further replies to the budget address for today, so we will return to item number 4, returns to oral questions. Item 5, recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member for Range Lake.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to acknowledge two of the pages from Range Lake that are in the House today, Safiya Hashi and Anusha SivaKumar, and I'm really glad that they're here in the House. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Item 6, acknowledgements. Item 7, oral questions. Member for Hay River North.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 487-18(2): COMMERCIAL FISHING AND AGRICULTURE INDUSTRIES

MR. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In regard to the money that the government had put aside to help revitalize the commercial fishery, two days ago when I questioned the Minister of ITI about this he said, "The important thing about the \$1.4 million is for the Department of ITI to use that as leverage for the funding that we are putting forward to CanNor to give us the best potential to help build that plant in Hay River," and he said, "We're getting very close to an agreement with Freshwater regarding the plant."

So, Mr. Speaker, because this \$1.4 million isn't in next year's budget, is it because the Minister is confident that, before the end of this fiscal year, that money will be spent because we will have a deal for a new fish processing plant in Hay River? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is exactly what I'm hoping is going to happen with our deliberations with CanNor and Freshwater Marketing Corporation. Things are moving along, and when we make a deal I will announce it in the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SIMPSON: He had me pretty nervous, there. If this deal isn't struck and this money isn't spent by the end of this fiscal year, can this community have a guarantee that this \$1.4 million will be put back into the 2017-18 budget?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: As this is a mandated item for this Government of the Northwest Territories and it is my file and it's very important to me, if we don't make a deal before the end of this fiscal year I will be asking to carry this over in the summer.

MR. SIMPSON: An ask isn't a guarantee. I assumed the Ministers had the power to do more than just ask, but I'll take it for now. ITI has an agricultural consultant position. I spoke about it earlier. It's located here in Yellowknife. You know, with the beautiful, fertile ground in Yellowknife it only makes sense, right? Well, no, this used to be back in Hay River, you know, the heart of agriculture. I don't even know why I have to ask this, but can I get a guarantee from the Minister that this position will be moved back to Hay River? Better yet, can it be re-profiled so it's agriculture and fisheries, because we do have the two big industries in Hay River?

MR. SPEAKER: There appears to be a couple questions there. Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: First of all, this position still remains in Hay River, and to update the House, actually this job is at Human Resources. It's looking to become filled in the coming weeks, and with consultation on the job description moving forward we want to switch this job to an analyst position where it can look after agriculture and fishing. So this job remains in Hay River and it will look after both strategies.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Hay River North.

MR. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question. I won't put the Minister on the spot by asking him to justify why the manager of fisheries and agriculture is in Yellowknife. We know it can't be justified. So can I get the Minister to not just look into moving this position? It doesn't even need to be looked into. Can we just have this position moved to where it logically should be, in Hay River? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This manager position is located in Yellowknife. Its duties are a pan-territorial responsibility and it's best fit here in the ITI headquarters, and we have no plans on moving this position to Hay River.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Nunakput.

QUESTION 488-18(2):
YOUTH PROGRAMS TARGETED TO SMALL
COMMUNITIES

MR. NAKIMAYAK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, earlier I spoke about youth in small communities, and I have a couple of questions for the Minister responsible for Youth. Mr. Speaker, my first question to the Minister is: can the Minister give an outline of GNWT-led programs that currently and specifically serve youth in our small and remote communities? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister responsible for Youth.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government does support a lot of youth initiatives right across all departments within the governments. MACA, obviously, is one of the bigger supporters in the youth program. We feel that all our programs address the needs of youth across the Northwest Territories, right into our smallest communities. We have the NWT Youth Ambassadors Program, which has been very successful. Both my departments and the Department of MACA work together to support and fund the Northern Youth Abroad Program.

We have various programs that communities can access funding. As I mentioned, we have programs right across the board, ENR, MACA, Health and Social Services. They have the Take a Kid Trapping Program; as well, we have some food, breakfast programs in the schools that we partner up with the Department of Health and Social Services as well as MACA. We can provide a list to the Member with those kinds of application forms. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. NAKIMAYAK: I appreciate the response. My final question is: when is the next deadline for the Youth Contributions Program, which funds community-led projects, and how can organizations apply?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As mentioned, there are a lot of applications right across the board. The Youth Contributions is one that's run through MACA, and any community can access that program. Just apply to the regional office. I encourage all small communities that want to apply to that program to apply as soon as possible in the new fiscal year, because I believe it is on a first-come, first-served basis.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Nahendeh.

QUESTION 489-18(2):
JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN IMPLEMENTATION
FUNDING

MR. THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday, my colleague from Hay River North was asking the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment about junior kindergarten, and we seem to have some differences of opinion. I've heard 3.1. Now I hear from the government it's 2.7. So is junior kindergarten truly fully funded by this government? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I do realize that I could have been a little bit clearer in my answers to questions on junior kindergarten yesterday. I do apologize for that.

Junior kindergarten is expected to cost \$5.1 million to implement. The additional \$2.7 million that was announced, along with the original investment of \$1.5 million, plus \$900,000 that we've identified internally within the department, will cover the implementation costs. We are committed to continue working with the superintendents and the District Education Councils towards the smooth implementation of junior kindergarten. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. THOMPSON: I thank the Minister for his answer. Yesterday, we talked about a 2 per cent that the divisional boards have to come up with. So if the government is fully funding this program at \$5.1 million, why are they asking the divisional boards to come up with 2 per cent?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Yes, under the original plan for funding junior kindergarten, we had asked education authorities to cover \$2.76 million through a reallocation of existing funding that was provided, which was about 1.76 per cent. This amount will now be covered by the \$2.7 million in new funding that was announced yesterday.

MR. THOMPSON: I thank the Minister for his answer. If I wasn't confused before, I think I'm a little bit confused now. So are we asking the school boards to provide 2 per cent, or are we not asking them to provide 2 per cent for this junior kindergarten?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: I do believe I just answered that question, but the department is currently working with the education authority superintendents to determine how to allocate the additional funding.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Nahendeh.

MR. THOMPSON: Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Minister for the clarification. So the government is actually not funding it completely. We're working with the divisional boards to find the money, so it's not fully funded by the Government of the Northwest Territories unless it's from the funding that exists, that we get right now.

So yesterday the Minister was talking about that they have to find it from the surplus of these educational boards. Can this Minister verify that each school board has a surplus that they can actually find to help fund this 1.76 per cent funding? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just for clarification, we are fully funding implementation of junior kindergarten. The Member asked questions about the surplus situation. Although the DEC's across the territory have a combined surplus of \$10 million, the Member's riding, the Deh Cho DEC, is currently in an accumulated deficit position as a result of one-time costs such as termination benefits and employee removals. The department is working with the DDEC to come up with a plan to recover that deficit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

QUESTION 490-18(2):
GNWT POSITION ON CARBON PRICING

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Premier on a carbon pricing scheme for the Northwest Territories. Can the Premier explain his change in position from opposing carbon pricing made in June 2016 to when he signed the Northwest Territories onto the Pan-Canadian Framework on Climate Change in December 2016? Merci, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Honourable Premier.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting. The Member and the "MLA for centralization" were talking about higher carbon taxes. We didn't change our position. We weren't just going to roll over and let the federal government impose carbon pricing willy-nilly. We're here to look after the best interests of the people of the Northwest Territories, so we felt that we negotiated a better position for our territory when it comes to carbon taxes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I appreciate the response from the Premier, but I guess the facts speak for themselves. He signed onto a news release that said he opposes a carbon pricing scheme, and then in December he signs onto a national agreement that says it's okay.

I guess I'd like to know precisely what is Cabinet doing to develop carbon tax for the Northwest Territories, or will we wait for Ottawa to impose something?

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Our government is doing some significant research, looking at the various carbon pricing mechanisms that have been imposed by or have been proposed by the federal government. We are looking to see what kind of models are out there. We are doing modelling to see how it could work. As I've said many times in this House, we have gone out to consult with the people of the Northwest Territories with regard to a new climate change strategy, a new energy strategy. If the Member would prefer to have us impose one on the people of the Northwest Territories, from his Member's statement, that appeared to be so. We are going and having these different consultations, and we will work with the Government of Canada to make sure that we all understand how a carbon price or carbon tax would affect the people of the Northwest Territories before we implement one.

MR. O'REILLY: So let's talk about imposing things. I was at the consultation session here in Yellowknife. A carbon tax wasn't even mentioned there, so I'm not sure who the Premier is consulting because he's certainly not consulting with this side of the House or the residents of the Northwest Territories on a carbon tax.

I guess I'd like to know whether the Premier has actually asked the federal government to ensure that any carbon tax revenues collected here will not adversely impact our territory formula funding, and what was the response from the federal government?

HON. BOB MCLEOD: We are consulting with the people of the Northwest Territories, and I can send the schedule of all of the consultations to the Member. I have offered and written to committee offering a briefing. I expect that there will be briefings on it. The request was for a written briefing earlier. We provided that. We are also offering a briefing. The Government of Canada, the first question that we raised was we didn't want it to affect our formula financing. That was one of our conditions for signing on. They reassured us it would not impact us on formula financing. Certainly, they also confirmed that, whatever carbon pricing mechanism would be in place, all of the revenues would stay in the Territories and would be spent in the Territories.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the response from the Premier. I think we are

getting somewhere now. I am glad to hear that he has assurances and he has said now in this House that any carbon pricing scheme is not going to affect our territorial formula funding. That is a good thing. I guess I am really wondering what the schedule, then, is and whether there is an intention to actually work with this side of the House in developing this carbon pricing scheme, because I haven't seen anything. I went to one of the consultation sessions. The Premier seems to think I am not even aware of them. I actually went to the one in Yellowknife. The words "carbon tax" weren't even there. I would like to know from the Premier: is there actually a schedule? When does he expect to report back and work with this side of the House in terms of developing a proper carbon tax system for the Northwest Territories? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I will have to clarify what actually happened at the consultation. I was hearing that those who attended from Yellowknife were supportive of a carbon tax, and similarly in Fort Smith. I will have to clarify what exactly came out at those meetings. As I have said, we have written to committee and offered a briefing. At that time, I see it as a start of developing. We will have the results of the consultations by that time.

The Government of Canada has indicated that their federal budget will be out early in February, so I expect probably within the next week or so we can expect more details on carbon pricing. Certainly, we know that the national standard is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30 per cent over 2005 levels. As a government, we have already done that. With the moratorium on oil and gas, it certainly would make our job a lot easier. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member for Sahtu.

QUESTION 491-18(2):
STATUS OF MACKENZIE VALLEY HIGHWAY
FUNDING SUBMISSION

MR. MCNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today my question is for the Minister of Transportation. Can the Minister please provide the status of the federal application for the construction of the Mackenzie Valley Highway between Fort Wrigley and Norman Wells? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Transportation.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government of the Northwest Territories submitted a business case to the federal government under the National Infrastructure Fund and the New Building Canada Plan for \$700 million. The federal government reviewed the business case, but it remains temporarily suspended

depending on how the long-term plan for infrastructure money is going to be. We look forward to what the federal government has to say on the budget coming forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MCNEELY: Thanks to the Minister for that response here; and in the previous, our Premier mentioned that the budget would come out in another two weeks. Mr. Speaker, the Minister noted in his response that the funding submission for the Mackenzie Valley Highway still remains suspended. What is the Department of Transportation doing to advance this project in the meantime?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: The department is working to advance the next priority phase of the project, the Bear River Bridge. In particular, the department is conducting a review of the original design that was done in 2005. What we want to do is make sure it is compliant with current codes and standards in addition to the funding that was received earlier in the new year. We are working on the Canyon Creek project to move that along. This project will bring training and experience gained by the Sahtu residents that will be used towards the next phase of the construction of the Mackenzie Valley Highway.

MR. MCNEELY: The BRB, or the Bear River Bridge, as I recall was tendered procured in 2006. Now the Minister is saying 2005. I am a bit confused.

My question is, I understand the department, having mentioned the Bear River Bridge, in preparation for the Bear River Bridge, going back to 2006 and the procurement, there were some materials purchased and some materials produced, more specifically a stockpile south of Tulita for the mixture of concrete, Mr. Speaker. Since the stockpile of gravel that has been destined to be used for the Bear River Bridge project, but right now, while there is no work taking place there, since the location of this pit is near Tulita and the gravel is not being used, I am wondering if the material can be made available to the community of Tulita who does not have a source year-round and a supply for projects for the community.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: To the 2005 and 2006 discrepancy, I believe 2005 is when the design was done for the bridge. Just to clarify that.

After that was shortly done, there was approximately 3,700 cubic metres of granular that was produced for the bridge near Tulita. That particular product is made for a specific use. It is made for high-strength concrete for when we go ahead and proceed with the building of the Great Bear River Bridge. It is not suitable for road construction or paths or that type of use within the

community. I do suggest that the Member get a hold of our superintendent in Fort Simpson and ask him how we can support him to find the source of gravel for the community needs.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Sahtu.

MR. MCNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Minister for that response. It will be particularly good news to the community of Tulita. Tulita, I must say, is the only Sahtu community that does not have year-round gravel. We have not seen, at the community level, expansions of subdivisions or roads or paths. The material has to be imported at a very costly price, I must add. My last question, Mr. Speaker, is: can the Minister also mention and provide to the House here the status of the Canyon Creek all-season road, and also mention when will construction start on that particular project now that financing is secured? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Construction of the Canyon Creek all-season road access, we are expecting it to begin in March of this year, 2017. This is expected to be completed by October of 2018. We are very glad to announce this project. It is going to bring significant employment to the region, and training, as I said in my earlier comments. It is going to bring approximately 50 jobs to the region and help with the training aspect of a number of individuals. We contributed to our mandate working forward. Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Mackenzie Delta.

QUESTION 492-18(2):
DISPOSAL OF CONDEMNED HOUSING UNITS

MR. BLAKE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in follow-up to my Member's statement earlier today, I have a few questions to the Minister of the Housing Corporation. I would like to ask the Minister: can the Minister provide an update on the disposal of old housing units in the Mackenzie Delta? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently within two communities, Aklavik and Fort McPherson, we have seven surplus units in Aklavik and we have two surplus units in Fort McPherson. Of those, the two in Aklavik and two in Fort McPherson will be tendered for sale and five units will be up to be demolished.

MR. BLAKE: Looking to the future, what is the Housing Corporation's next steps on this issue?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: So it's a really fine balance that we have to do. As the Housing Minister, we have to make some difficult decisions, so we have needs in the communities to build new housing units to replace ones that are not able to be used anymore. We have major renovations in communities that we have to address, and then we have the units that are no longer usable and it's very costly to do the remediation and the disposal of. So it's a fine balance, but we have committed because we know it's an issue. So we committed within this year and the next fiscal year that we're going to actually take out 101 surplus units throughout the Northwest Territories.

Next step, though, in all honesty, is recognizing that we're getting the surveys in. We are expecting to get a lot of really creative ideas, solutions for communities. So in preparation for that we're looking at some ideas. We're looking at perhaps training programs in the communities to help take down some of these units. With that, then, there would be some liabilities, so we're considering the liabilities for that.

We're also considering, and hoping that the surveys will back it up, that some of the units, even though they can't be used or they can't be sold, that there is still material within those homes that can be used by the communities. So we're also looking into the legal liabilities of what we would have to take as ownership as the Government of the Northwest Territories if we were to get the community to take those materials.

So in summary and conclusion, we're waiting for the ideas from the community. We are also doing some prep work to make sure that, if we can use training programs and give the materials to the communities instead of just taking them to the waste sites, that we are covered legally.

MR. BLAKE: I'd like to ask the Minister: will the Minister work with each community, as every community is different? A good example is, in the past in Aklavik, for example, they did take some units apart and gave that material out in the community; but as you know, in Aklavik we have floods and we did get a flood that year and also high winds, so a lot of that material was left around the community, which the hamlet had to clean up.

So would the Minister ensure that each community is consulted with before a decision is made?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: The whole purpose of the housing survey is to actually define what the residents of the Northwest Territories want to define within that compilation of results; individual community plans. So it would be disrespectful of myself as a Minister to go forward and try to receive the results from each separate

community, working with them to find out their issues and their solutions and then not continue to work with them.

So the short answer is, yes, I am committed to working with each individual community to define what their issues are, what their solutions are and how best to implement their solutions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Kam Lake.

QUESTION 493-18(2):
TERRITORIAL AGREEMENT ON FEDERAL
HEALTH CARE TRANSFERS

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have questions for the Premier about the new healthcare funding from Canada. The Premier was very public about his opposition to the deal as was presented by the federal government and a number of weeks later has signed on to the deal and spoke to the great benefits of it. So how did the deal change from when he initially opposed it to when he ultimately accepted it? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Honourable Premier.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The deal that was originally presented was on a take-it-or-leave-it basis; it was significantly less than what we're getting now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Could the Honourable Premier give a few more details than just that? The deal that we accepted is still less money than we have enjoyed previously on -- even with the additional mental health funding and homecare funding, it's still less than we would have received under the old agreement, so can the Premier be specific about how we're winning on this deal?

HON. BOB MCLEOD: I should ask the Member if he could tell me how much money we're receiving so that -- how he came to that conclusion.

Maybe I'll just tell him, so he'll know that we are spending \$445 million on healthcare. We are receiving, on a per capita basis, funding through the Canadian Health Act. Per capita, we are receiving about \$40 million, and the federal government offered targeted funding. Over 10 years the percentage increase on the per capita Canadian healthcare funding was 6 per cent, and it was going to drop to 3 per cent. We had a program called THIF which helped with medical travel. It provided for innovation and also for some other benefits which was going to disappear completely.

MR. TESTART: I am aware that the escalator was decreasing from 6 to 3 per cent, and that was the source of the frustration initially. It does sound like there's some other funding available, and I thank the Premier for making that more clear.

The last thing he mentioned was the THIF, I think, or the acronym for the innovation program that helps with medical travel. The Premier mentioned that it may have been disappearing. I assume that it is not and it is part of this deal. Can the Premier elaborate on that funding? How much is there? Has it increased from its previous level of funding and will it be there to benefit Northerners?

MR. BOB MCLEOD: I'm not at liberty to disclose that information; obviously, the Government of Canada is still negotiating with many provinces. The three territories felt that what was offered in a very short period of time for which to respond was sufficient to allow us to accept the deal going forward and felt that as a government, as the three northern territories, we were very diligent in finding ways to become more efficient and effective in delivering our healthcare and consequently we were penalized because we were told, well, you're only spending this much money. I'm not at liberty to disclose the details because the Government of Canada is still under negotiations, and at the appropriate time we'll be able to release that information.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Kam Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Premier for that answer. My last question, Mr. Speaker, is the Premier also made public statements to the effect that, if this deal remained at its current levels, there would have to be cuts made to continue to support the healthcare system. The new sources of funding that he has previously addressed in this line of questioning, is that enough to avoid the need for cuts to pay for decreases in the health system? Do we have enough money flowing in that we don't need to make any cuts or adjustments in order to maintain a quality healthcare system in the Northwest Territories? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the fact that the majority of our healthcare funding is provided for through a formula financing arrangement will allow us to have enough money so we don't have to resort to program funding.

On the money from the Healthcare Act, which is on a per capita basis, because of the fact that it's reduced, it went from 6 per cent to 3 per cent. Obviously, that will have some implications but, on a per capita basis, the difference is a little over a million dollars. The targeted funding for home care

and for mental health is on a per capita basis, and it's close to offsetting the reductions from the Canadian Healthcare Act, but, obviously, depending how much we want to provide for home care and mental health, we may have to supplement that funding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife North.

QUESTION 494-18(2):
CONSTRUCTION OF THE WHATI ALL-SEASON
ROAD

MR. VANTHUYNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Transportation. Earlier today I spoke about support for roads within our mandate, and we know that recently we made a joint announcement between the territorial government and the federal government with regard to the all-season road, the Tlicho all-season road. My question to the Minister is: can the Minister provide us, for public record, an update on what the all-in cost is going to be for that road, and maybe what the government's responsibility will be for their portion and how we'll finance that portion? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Transportation.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The announcement on January 11th from the federal government was a conditional funding for this project from P3 Canada. As this project moves forward, the proposed or the estimated cost is \$175 million for this road. However, the procurement for this project is undertaken through a competitive process, and the overall anticipated cost is not being released until the closing of that tender. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. VANTHUYNE: Thank you to the Minister for his reply. That leads me, I suppose, into the next question of asking, then: what are the next steps and when can we expect, knowing what's expected for the tender process and the RFQ and RFP process? If the Minister could elaborate on that and, in particular, as it relates to potential schedule or timelines that affect that.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: First of all, the project is currently undergoing an environmental assessment by the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board. That was submitted or it was referred to an assessment in, if I remember correctly, end of July of 2016.

As we move forward and it works through that process, the next part of it was that we actually release the request for proposal to get assistance in developing the procurement documents for this project. Moving on from there, the next step will be

going out to an RFQ process to see to get qualified bidders who can handle this project, the building of it and the financing of it. From there, we'll move to an RFP process and, from there, hopefully into construction. So I hope that answers the Member's question.

MR. VANTHUYNE: Again, thank you to the Minister for his reply. Mr. Speaker, often when we have to build projects which such technical expertise, we end up having to rely on southern contractors to do this work. Can the Minister tell us what we can expect in terms of assurance for Northern companies' involvement and, maybe even more particularly, the Tlicho companies' involvement in this project?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: When we get to the RFQ and the RFP processes, we will be sure we do our due diligence to incorporate as much northern content as possible. It would be my best understanding, I think, that whoever the proponent would be moving forward on this project is going to have some Tlicho involvement. I can't see that not happening. Who knows what's going to happen in the tendering process, but we will do our due diligence to make sure that all Northerners get to benefit from this procurement on this project.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

QUESTION 495-18(2):
ENVIRONMENTAL LIABILITIES ASSOCIATED
WITH THE ACQUISITION OF NORTHERN
TRANSPORTATION COMPANY LIMITED
ASSETS

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today, over the noon hour, we had the pleasure to hear from the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment about the purchase of the NTCL assets in Hay River and elsewhere on the Mackenzie River system. There were lots of issues raised about environmental liabilities, and I'm just wondering if the Minister of Lands could give us a few highlights of what the department is doing with regard to these environmental liabilities with the NTCL assets that we've now acquired? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Lands.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we did hear at lunch, of course, these assets have been turned over through the process, the bankruptcy process, from NTCL to our government. Detailed questions might be better addressed to the Minister of Public Works and Services.

The Department of Lands, of course, is regulator of these properties, and there has been a very preliminary inspection of the vessels and certain

parcels of land, but there was no environmental testing of soil or land. I understand also that it was noted that there were some untended barges moored off the dock in Tuktoyaktuk which would be the responsibility of the federal government. That has been reported to the federal government, as it is their responsibility.

So there has been some very preliminary examination of these properties. We are, the Department of Lands, of course, the regulator. The operator is the DPW. As to historic responsibility for any environmental liabilities, that is a complex issue which I think my department, perhaps with Justice and Lands, will have to look into. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I'd like to thank the Minister for his response there. Maybe he's going to be wearing a different hat for this one. Can he tell the House whether GNWT has actually contacted the federal government with regard to liabilities on any of these properties?

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: I don't believe the federal government has been contacted about the specific lands that have been turned over to us from NTCL. As I did mention, there was a report made to the federal government about some barges moored off the dock in Tuktoyaktuk because that is their responsibility. We're still going through the paperwork of the acquisition of these properties, and I don't think we have been in contact with the federal government to discuss any potential long-term liability. Their position is likely to be that they have none in view of the time that has gone by, since NTCL was a federal Crown corporation.

MR. O'REILLY: I appreciate the answer from the Minister. Look, I recognize there's a lot of work that's being done on this issue by a number of departments, but if we haven't even actually started to contact the federal government -- earlier today at noon we heard that it was the position of our government that there was some federal responsibility here, so what is going on? Is there some federal liability for these lands or not? If there is, can the Minister share with this side of the House, in a legal opinion or whatever, what basis do they believe that there is some federal responsibility?

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: As we heard in the presentation at lunch, the government is going through a great number of documents that they did receive as part of the bankruptcy proceedings. We'll have to examine those documents to determine whether any responsibility still remains with the federal government.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the response from the Minister. Perhaps while he's looking through those documents, he might think about the devolution agreement, as well. Can the Minister tell the House whether the devolution agreement and the provisions in there pertain to these lands. Would they cover these lands? Because, I guess, through the agreement, we have the ability to go back to the federal government and work out some remediation details. Does the devolution agreement cover any of the NTCL lands? If the Minister can't answer us now, can he get back to us and let us know? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Mr. Speaker, this is a complex question. I think we will have to go through the documentation. These lands are not only in Hay River. Those are the ones we often think about when we think about this bankruptcy, but there are Inuvialuit lands and there are lands in Norman Wells. I think we need to go through the documentation before we can give the Member an informed response. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Nahendeh.

QUESTION 496-18(2):
JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN IMPLEMENTATION
FUNDING

MR. THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I was asking the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment about junior kindergarten. With the Finance Minister talking about the program being fully funded, can the Minister please clarify in this House, because I have received numerous phone calls from teachers -- this is for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment -- when are we getting the full funding for junior kindergarten? Is it this fiscal year for the budget or is it going to be next year, fiscal budget, or by the end of this term? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After the announcement yesterday, staff at the department is going to be contacting all the superintendents of all the boards. Once we get those initial discussions completed, I myself will have a meeting with all the board chairs to look at how we are going to be allocating this additional funding throughout the schools in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. THOMPSON: I appreciate the Minister's answer. I guess my question, though, is: is it going to be funded by the end of this fiscal term or this fiscal year, next fiscal year, or by the end of our

term? In the Finance Minister's statement there was \$2.7 million by the end of this term. I am just trying to get it clarified because I have had a number of parents and teachers phone going, "Great, we are fully funding junior kindergarten." I am going, "Have to confirm."

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Yes, it is great news, and I am glad the Member is getting calls because it has been quite the announcement that we made yesterday. As I mentioned, our department is working with all the superintendents and the education authorities to look at how we are going to be allocating this additional funding. I can't give him a timeline until we have those discussions with the superintendents and then the board chairs.

MR. THOMPSON: I thank the Minister for his answer. I understand he has to work with the school boards and the superintendents in that area. My big concern is: are we implementing junior kindergarten next fiscal year for all the schools in the Northwest Territories?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Good question.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As I have said many times in this House, it is going to be implemented in all the schools in the Northwest Territories in the 2017-18 school year, not next fiscal year.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Nahendeh.

MR. THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Minister for that clarification. I guess my concern is that, if we are funding this completely, where is this money going to be coming from to implement junior kindergarten? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, we are going to have to have those discussions with the superintendent and the board chairs. When we first initially rolled out junior kindergarten, as you know, 23 communities did the uptake, and some of them couldn't do it because they didn't have any four-year-olds. That is going to reflect the operational costs as we fund junior kindergarten moving forward. Those initial discussions have to happen before we can look at how we are going to be using that additional funding that was announced yesterday in the budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Kam Lake.

QUESTION 497-18(2):
EXPANDED ROLE FOR GNWT COURT
SHERIFFS

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I note that the current budget proposes to increase the complement of deputy sheriffs in the Department of Justice by two. I wonder if the Minister of Justice can fill me in on if they have had the discussion about the sheriffs taking over all court services in the justice system and allow the RCMP out of the courtroom and onto the streets where they belong? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Justice.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Mr. Speaker, until 2010, I believe all escorts were done in Yellowknife by the RCMP. I was looking at some statistics, which I can't seem to put my hand on at this time, but I understand about 80 per cent of the escorts now are done by the sheriff's office in Yellowknife. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Could the Minister be clear if it is 100 per cent or if we are still using the RCMP for a service that is not required? I think what I am getting across is: has an assessment been done if we are going to move the sheriff's office towards full coverage of court security and escorting services so we can get the RCMP back on the streets, keeping people safe, and allow our sheriffs to do a much-needed job that they are perfectly capable of doing, especially now that you have been given more resources to do that job?

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: The sheriff's office is doing 80 per cent of the escorts at this time. I have actually found the statistics. In the last year, there were 3,241 escorts and the RCMP only did 455. I imagine there would always be circumstances in which it would be required that the RCMP do the escorts. I don't know whether the figure of 20 per cent, which is roughly the number they do now, will go down.

MR. TESTART: I appreciate the statistics from the Minister. It is good to see we are making better use. Apart from escorts, are we moving away from having an RCMP officer in the courtroom securing it? Has that policy shift been discussed with both our partners in the RCMP and within the Department of Justice? Have you had that discussion? Are we moving toward the model that we have seen in other jurisdictions, such as Nunavut, where the sheriffs are the sole security personnel and peace officers responsible for court security and we can start shifting the RCMP to other responsibilities as through our police services contract?

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: With respect to the situation in Nunavut, I understand that the sheriff's office does the transfers and prisoner court security only in Iqaluit. There is a possibility, of course, of changing our system to be more like that of Alberta and some of the southern provinces. However, that would also require the agreement of another party, which the Member opposite did not mention, the judiciary. The long tradition is to have RCMP officers in the courthouse, and any change that we might be planning would have to be vetted through them.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Kam Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hear a lot of excuses from the Minister. If he is not interested in this policy change, I wish he would be forthright about it. Has he talked to the judiciary in addition to the other two departments I have listed, and can he answer if the department has spoken to the RCMP, the judiciary, and to other GNWT departments? Have we had this discussion about this policy change, and is the Minister willing to make that move? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LOUIS SEBERT: Mr. Speaker, I am willing to have that discussion. I don't know whether I am willing to make that move, because I would have to consider the RCMP, the Government of the Northwest Territories, and also the judiciary's concerns. I have not spoken to the judiciary about this. We have meetings with them perhaps once a year. I will perhaps bring it up at the next meeting. We have looked at this situation, and generally speaking I would have to say we do seem to be content with the present arrangement, but we are certainly always open to new ideas. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Item 8, written questions. Item 9, returns to written questions. Item 10, replies to Commissioner's opening address. Item 11, replies to budget address. Item 12, petitions. Item 13, reports of standing and special committees. Item 14, reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 15, tabling of documents. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 262-18(2):
AURORA COLLEGE ANNUAL REPORT 2015-
2016

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document entitled "Aurora College Annual Report, 2015-2016." Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Tabling of documents. Item 16, notices of motion. Item 17, notices of motion for first reading of bills. Item 18, motions. Item 19, first reading of bills. Item 20, second reading of bills. Item 21, consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters. Tabled Document 261-18(2): Northwest Territories Main Estimates, 2017-2018 with Member for Hay River North in the Chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that we report progress.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. Testart. There is a motion on the floor to report progress. The motion is in order and non-debatable. All those in favour? All those opposed?

---Carried

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): I will now rise and report progress.

MR. SPEAKER: May I have the report, Member for Hay River North?

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 261-18(2), Northwest Territories Main Estimates, 2017-2018. I would like to report progress. Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Do we have a seconder? Member for Kam Lake.

---Carried

MR. SPEAKER: Item 23, third reading of bills. Mr. Clerk, orders of the day.

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Mercer): Orders of the day for Friday, February 3, 2017, at 10:00 a.m.:

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions

5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Acknowledgements
7. Oral Questions
8. Written Questions
9. Returns to Written Questions
10. Replies to Commissioner's Opening Address
11. Replies to Budget Address (Day 3 of 7)
12. Petitions
13. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
14. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
15. Tabling of Documents
16. Notices of Motion
17. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
18. Motions
19. First Reading of Bills
20. Second Reading of Bills
21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Tabled Document 261-18(2), Northwest Territories Main Estimates, 2017-2018
22. Report of Committee of the Whole
23. Third Reading of Bills
24. Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Masi, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Friday, February 3, 2017, at 10:00 a.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 3:32 p.m.