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The Honourable Jackson Lafferty, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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Box 1320

Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

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

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Monday, February 6, 2017****Members Present**

Hon. Glen Abernethy, Mr. Beaulieu, Hon. Caroline Cochrane, Ms. Green, Hon. Jackson Lafferty, Hon. Bob McLeod, Hon. Robert McLeod, Mr. McNeely, Hon. Alfred Moses, Mr. Nadli, Mr. Nakimayak, 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

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Jackson Lafferty): Good afternoon, colleagues. Item 2, Ministers' statements. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

Ministers' Statements

**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 115-18(2):
FUNDING OF JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN**

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to provide clarification on the implementation of junior kindergarten in the Northwest Territories. I think we can all agree that we want to give NWT children the support they need to thrive and be successful, Mr. Speaker.

Junior kindergarten is one of the ways this government is going to give the NWT's kids the best start that we can. Junior kindergarten will provide four-year-old children with the necessary foundation for learning in the early years of their life. It provides a safe and caring environment and promotes the cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual, and physical development of all children through a play-based approach.

Equitable access to quality programming in our school setting so young children can be ready and prepared for success in the K-12 system is something we can all strive for. That is why it is important to have junior kindergarten implemented and available to all parents in all communities in the Northwest Territories in September 2017.

We expect junior kindergarten to cost \$5.1 million to implement across the remainder of the communities. As a government, we have committed to fully funding these ongoing costs for the 2017-18 school year and into the future. We have increased funding in the proposed 2017-18 GNWT budget and made a commitment to include the remaining funding in the future.

Some people may have wondered why we did not put the full amount in this year's budget, Mr. Speaker. The answer is because the whole amount is not going to be needed in this fiscal year. While junior kindergarten will be fully implemented in all communities this September, school board budgets line up with the school year, which means they cross two GNWT fiscal years. The total cost will also be affected by the actual number of children who enroll in junior kindergarten, and so cannot be fully known in advance.

What we do know now is that this government is committed to fully funding junior kindergarten, Mr. Speaker. We will work with the boards to make the money they need to implement junior kindergarten available to them when it is needed. Once we know the actual enrolment figures, the government will bring a request for supplementary funding to the Legislative Assembly in the fall of 2017 to fully fund implementation.

I would also like to add, the department will fund the one-time expenses associated with purchase of play-based equipment and for any classroom modifications. As a result of these commitments to fully fund junior kindergarten implementation, there should be minimal impact on other classroom programming. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Ministers' statements. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 116-18(2):
COST OF LIVING IN THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES**

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to highlight the work done by the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs to support the Government of the Northwest Territories' priority of lowering the cost of living for residents of the Northwest Territories. Progress towards our commitments in this area is essential if we are to improve our residents' quality of life and attract more people to make their homes in the territory.

Mr. Speaker, Municipal and Community Affairs is assisting community governments to address energy management and improve energy

efficiencies. Municipal and Community Affairs serves on the Arctic Energy Alliance Board and has developed a strong partnership with the organization in the area of community energy planning, energy audits, and representing the interests of community governments related to energy management.

The Northwest Territories Asset Management Strategy was released in May 2016. The strategy works towards supporting communities to meet basic maintenance requirements in order to extend the useful life of their infrastructure. It also takes into account new building technologies that support improvements in energy efficiency as community governments respond and adapt to climate change. In early 2017, Municipal and Community Affairs will roll out a pilot program to train and support community governments as they implement asset management software.

Through the department's School of Community Government, community government elected officials and staff are able to access a variety of training related to government's responsibilities and administrative operations. Municipal and Community Affairs is currently reviewing all of its course curricula in order to ensure that, where appropriate, content related to energy management, capital and asset management, and funding of energy management initiatives is included. All of the various curricula will have been reviewed by the end of fiscal year 2019.

Municipal and Community Affairs is also completing research into the feasibility of enabling Northwest Territories community governments to set up revolving funds for energy efficiency measures. Municipal and Community Affairs has met with the City of Yellowknife to discuss this initiative and will be conducting further stakeholder engagement with other Northwest Territories municipalities in the coming months.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the programs and support available through the department, community governments are also able to access various federal funding programs to help with the development of community public infrastructure.

Since 2013, Municipal and Community Affairs has been working with community governments to access funding through the New Building Canada Plan. Under the umbrella of this plan, the Government of the Northwest Territories has signed an updated Gas Tax Administrative Agreement and the Provincial-Territorial Infrastructure Component, both of which provide funding to community government to support the development of public infrastructure at the community level.

The Provincial-Territorial Infrastructure Component will provide \$258 million towards Northwest Territories projects. Of that funding, \$38.7 million will go to community governments through the Small Communities Fund provided between 2014 and 2023.

In 2016, the federal government announced two additional funding programs:

- the Clean Water and Wastewater Fund, which will provide \$51.7 million for water and wastewater infrastructure before March 2019; and
- the Public Transit Fund, which will provide the City of Yellowknife with \$320,000 to support public transit before March 2018.

Our investments into energy efficiency and improved infrastructure for community governments help to lower the capital and operational costs for community governments, thereby increasing the supports community governments can provide and ultimately increasing the quality of life for Northwest Territories residents. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Ministers' statements. Minister of Transportation.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 117-18(2): INUVIK TO TUKTOYAKTUK HIGHWAY

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that the Department of Transportation's contractor has started its fourth and final winter of construction on the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk Highway. As we come nearer to completing construction, I want to talk about the significance of this project to the communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk and the residents of the Beaufort Delta.

The project has already significantly contributed to local employment. At the peak of construction last winter, more than 430 individuals were employed on the project, with 74 per cent of these coming from the Beaufort Delta region or other NWT communities. Additionally, approximately 185 people have benefitted from training and educational experiences like learning how to operate heavy equipment to wildlife monitoring. These are skills that can be transferred to a variety of industries and support the development of a strong northern workforce.

Improved access to natural resources resulting from the new highway will create economic development and employment opportunities in the future by attracting development from industry.

Further employment opportunities will become available through future operations and

maintenance contracts for the highway. While the Government of the Northwest Territories continues to review its procurement options, we expect to make a decision on the operations and maintenance contract by spring 2017.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Transportation is working with the communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, and other GNWT departments to celebrate the opening of the highway and prepare residents to take advantage of the resulting benefits.

Two multi-stakeholder Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk Highway committees have been meeting monthly to organize three separate celebrations.

The first celebration will be held in spring 2017 to celebrate the last winter road between the two communities. The winter road has long served as an important link to residents of Tuktoyaktuk, supporting intercommunity travel and the delivery of essential goods. Once the highway is done, residents of Tuktoyaktuk will be able to realize savings from a more cost-effective year-round delivery of these goods.

The official opening of the highway will take place on November 15, 2017. This event will be a full celebration with all stakeholders, including dignitaries from the communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, Aboriginal governments, the federal government, and Members of the 18th Legislative Assembly. The official opening will be a celebration of national significance, marking the first time Canada has been connected by highway from coast to coast to coast, and has been designated one of four Canada 150 infrastructure projects by the federal government.

These celebrations are being planned in both Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk to ensure maximum participation of community members from both communities.

Finally, a celebration led by the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment will be held in June 2018 with a special focus on promoting tourism-related opportunities around the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk Highway. The opening of the highway will help attract a host of visitors from across Canada and around the world who are interested in visiting the Arctic Ocean and exploring the natural beauty of the Beaufort Delta.

The Government of the Northwest Territories will help support the communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk to take advantage of business opportunities promoting tourism. More attractions will enhance tourism, promote economic spinoffs, and encourage return visits. The Government of the Northwest Territories is investigating the development of wayside pull-outs and rest areas

along the new highway. Investing in and supporting projects such as the development of a recreational vehicle park in Tuktoyaktuk will help enhance the availability of tourism products and services in the region.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, the Department of Transportation's contractor continues to work hard to complete this historic infrastructure project in the NWT, and we remain fully engaged with all stakeholders on properly recognizing this important achievement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Ministers' statements. Item 3, Members' statements. Member for Frame Lake.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON GIANT MINE OVERSIGHT BOARD

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. We all know of the terrible environmental and financial legacy left by the Giant Mine here in Yellowknife. I'm here today to deliver some good news. The Giant Mine Oversight Board recently officially opened its storefront office here in Yellowknife on Franklin Avenue. This board is the public face of an independent environmental watchdog on the Giant Mine Remediation Project. It is set up under a legally binding environmental agreement among the following:

- The Yellowknife's Dene First Nation;
- North Slave Metis Alliance;
- City of Yellowknife;
- Alternatives North;
- Government of the Northwest Territories; and
- Government of Canada.

The board is a non-profit society run by a set of directors appointed directly by these signatories to the agreement. The board consists of technical experts in various fields, including environmental health, contaminated site remediation, water quality, and more. They live in Yellowknife and elsewhere to ensure that we have the best expertise to provide proper oversight. The office also has a staff of two here in Yellowknife, and they are in the gallery watching us today. The board reviews submissions to regulators by the Giant Mine Remediation Project, reviews monitoring results and management plans, and reports publicly. Perhaps most interesting, the board also has the responsibility to coordinate research and development of other ways to manage the underground arsenic. That includes investigating

technologies to transform the arsenic into less toxic or non-toxic forms.

The funding for the board comes from the federal government at \$650,000 a year in 2015 dollars and is indexed to inflation for their oversight function. The research project funding is separate but ramps up to \$250,000 a year in 2019-20. It is also indexed to inflation and can be carried over from year to year. Any unused oversight funding can be rolled into the research program. The funding will last until all monitoring and maintenance is finished, or basically forever. This board and the agreement are a tremendous achievement for Yellowknife -- a government remediation project will now have independent oversight. This board will help to begin to build public confidence in what is happening at Giant Mine.

I also want to salute the work of the Independent Environmental Monitoring Agency. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to my colleagues. I also want to salute the work of the Independent Environmental Monitoring Agency, the environmental watchdog on the Ekati Mine that served as a model for what was negotiated for Giant Mine. That agency was established in 1997 and has a stellar reputation for technical oversight and working with communities. Perhaps these two oversight bodies, the Giant Mine Oversight Board and the Independent Environmental Monitoring Agency, might prove to be examples for what can be done for the remediation of Norman Wells.

We in the North have developed interesting arrangements in co-management that in many cases are the envy of the world, and I've just talked about a couple of those examples, Mr. Speaker. Mahsi.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON IMPACTS OF POVERTY ON HEALTH INDICATORS

MR. BEAULIEU: Marci cho, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to expand on something I raised in my reply to the Budget Address last week. I reminded the House that: "People with low incomes and no jobs have a tendency to have poorer health. That is simply a fact -- not just here, but all over the world."

So our response to poverty doesn't only need social interventions like education programs or housing

assistance and economic interventions like job creation. We also need health interventions. Poverty is a thief of dreams and opportunities, but it is also a thief of health, the so-called "life expectancy gap" or, more bluntly, the "death gap."

That's right. The wealthy are healthy, while poverty shortens our lives just like obesity, heavy drinking, or smoking does. One recent study tells us that low-income adults lose an average of 25 months off their life, while obesity takes off eight months and alcoholism, six months.

The group Canada Without Poverty recently zeroed in on our own poverty problems in the NWT: widespread disparities in housing, income, and employment that hit our First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people in our smaller communities harder than others.

Because, when it comes to health, poverty is a two-headed snake. Indirectly, poverty stands between people and education, employment opportunities, proper housing, and food security. Meanwhile, poverty directly causes chronic stress, linked to shorter lifespans and decreased health durability. Can you imagine how much harder it is to keep your body and mind healthy when you're stressed, hungry, tired, cold, and can't dependably access healthy food?

These things happen in Canada, Mr. Speaker. These things happen here.

Before taxes, 17.2 per cent of NWT families would be considered low-income, but that statistic doesn't tell the whole story -- it's also where you live within the NWT. It is 8.9 per cent of Yellowknife families and 29.8 per cent of the families in our small communities. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

MR. BEAULIEU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Confronting poverty can feel like a daunting chicken-and-egg problem. What do we tackle first? Are our people poor because they do not have jobs, or are they unemployed because they are poor? Are people poor because they are unhealthy, or vice versa?

The Department of Justice recently piloted an integrated case management project where different departments worked together to better serve clients. I wonder if we couldn't pilot something similar in health with a poverty focus, with expertise from Health, Education, even ITI, for traditional knowledge and economic know-how to target the health impacts of poverty in our small communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Members' statements. Member for Yellowknife North.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
FOOD SECURITY CHALLENGES

MR. VANTHUYNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of MACA alluded to in her statement earlier, the 18th Assembly's mandate includes an important commitment to addressing the current high cost of living. Going into the next period of our government's term, I would like more discussion and commitment to specific steps we can take to improve this territory's food security as a key factor in decreasing our cost of living.

Currently, we have committed to the development and implementation of an agricultural strategy. This will be a key document that will allow our government to give guidance and support to a budding agricultural movement in our territory. However, for us to reach some of the goals we have outlined we cannot focus on growing and harvesting of local food only. I think we must include the distribution and retail issues in our food systems as well.

For example, we want to revitalize commercial fisheries and traditional harvesting activities as part of our local food system. This will include distribution and retail issues that we must explore and examine. In order to fully understand the issues, I think we look to and include our municipal and private sector partners, Mr. Speaker.

We know that the measures we are supporting will reduce the cost of living and reduce our territory's carbon footprint and increase the types of economic opportunities that will be available in all of our communities. We have some very important examples of this right now with the Northern Farm Training Institute in Hay River and the Yellowknife Farmer's Market. These organizations are working at the community level to improve local food systems and support healthy and traditional food choices. They are able to identify issues beyond production and make suggestions to us on policy, program, and legislative changes to consider in support of reliable community food supplies.

For this reason, Mr. Speaker, I think it is imperative that our government continues to partner with these and similar organizations. These partnerships, along with other investments we are making in community transportation infrastructure, are what is going to change the food security challenges we are currently faced with.

Mr. Speaker, I think we all want to see a territory where people have opportunities to participate in the economy while lowering costs of living and

supporting their local and family food needs. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORTS

MR. MCNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to discuss the small business community. We recognize the small business community as a large contributor to the NWT economy; however, the small business community needs and requires a number of elements to sustain their viability. The NWT Business Development and Investment Corporation currently lends to 118 businesses throughout the NWT, operating across the Northwest Territories as well. As a result of BDIC's assistance, these businesses currently support 944 full-time positions' equivalent in the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, small businesses must have a healthy and sound environment on commerce and opportunity. Mr. Speaker, one word is needed, "opportunity" through market demand, projects, government programming support, management training, and affordable and expeditious access to capital.

Mr. Speaker, we as a government are continuing to design, redesign, upgrade, and support this important NWT sector. We can only do this by reviewing the number of past projects and must continue efficiencies on upgrading of NWT programming. Mr. Speaker, later I will have questions for the appropriate Minister. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Members' statements. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
POVERTY REDUCTION INVESTMENTS

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I still have a bad cold so I may have to stop and cough. Mr. Speaker, several national anti-poverty advocacy organizations released reports in November. The news for Canada as a whole and the NWT in particular is pretty grim: the fact is one in five children live in poverty; food bank use is going up, and so is the use of emergency shelters. The latter point was starkly confirmed when CBC North reported in the fall that emergency shelters are so full that people are being turned away. Their options are to ask people to sleep in RCMP cells. We know that some people have been walking to the hospital to sleep in chairs there in the lobby and others have been sleeping over a warm air vent. It's my concern that a cold exposure death is almost inevitable, and yet it is also preventable.

All of this news coincided with the 4th Annual GNWT Anti-Poverty Round Table held at the end of November in Inuvik. The major takeaway from the gathering was that the department has launched a new anti-poverty website and it will continue to administer the anti-poverty fund. Neither initiative is anything like the transformative action we need on poverty.

The Anti-Poverty Fund has funded some good work, mostly related to providing short-term help often in the form of food, but providing food is not the answer to hunger. Increasing local food production is a better alternative. As the saying goes, give a man a fish, he'll eat today; teach a man to fish, he'll eat for a lifetime. Investments in housing and homelessness have also been meagre given the size of the fund.

The Minister of Health and Social Services is fond of saying government can't solve the problem of poverty on its own. That's true, but only government has the capacity to make investments that will create systemic solutions to poverty. We need more housing, a basic income guarantee for those on low income, and investments in food production and distribution. The GNWT has obtained money from Ottawa to fund emergency shelter renovations and assist Housing First, but has yet to make a truly substantial investment of its own beyond the Anti-Poverty Fund. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

MS. GREEN: Thank you, colleagues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Delegates in Inuvik looked at indicators suggested by the Minister's staff that will tell us whether progress is being made in six areas of poverty reduction, including housing, food security, and income assistance. Unless and until there is significant government investment in poverty reduction, the indicators will show that nothing much has improved and some people are worse off, as the national reports reveal. The band aids we now provide are not a solution; they trap people in poverty, sometimes for generations. It's well past time for that to change. I will have questions for the Minister. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
PROPOSED ELIMINATION OF THE SOCIAL
WORK DIPLOMA PROGRAM

MR. THOMPSON: Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker. This past Thursday in my reply to the Budget Address I spoke about the importance of communication. Well, that very day at 9:00 a.m. students who are taking the Social Work Diploma course were told

that the class would start a bit later. At 9:30, the staff came in and said that the students would be receiving an e-mail from the college on what was happening. When asked the question, they were told that they could not answer anything until the e-mail was sent to them.

Mr. Speaker, at 10:23 a.m. the students taking the social work program were informed that they were the last intake and the college would not be taking any new social work students, including the students taking the access program this year. The following message came from the vice-president of education and training:

This morning, Aurora College is making some announcements about upcoming changes in programs and staffing of several programs, as well as changes to student housing and tuition rates. You will receive an all-student e-mail shortly with more details. One of the upcoming changes may affect you as a student in the Social Work Diploma program. Effective immediately, Aurora College will not be accepting new registrations in the Social Work Diploma program. However, courses in the program will continue to be offered for up to two more years so that the current students and any former students who are partway through the program will have an opportunity to complete. I know this news may come as a surprise, and I want to assure you that these changes are in no way a reflection on the work your instructors have been forming or the value we place on your program.

Mr. Speaker, in other words, the program was phased out without having the college strategic plan completed. I, like the students taking the program, am deeply saddened, disappointed, frustrated, and angry to hear this news. In speaking with several students, past and present, they strongly feel and I agree that the program was creating a workforce of northern social workers who are invested in the NWT. I have seen this program improve their lives immensely. To think this opportunity will no longer be available to the NWT is unreal. Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek unanimous consent to finish my statement. Thank you.

---Unanimous consent granted

MR. THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues. Mr. Speaker, the social issues in the NWT are not going away with an increase in industrial development. It needs to be a balanced approach by this government. When you look at our social issues in the NWT, they are vast and many, which could possibly have lessened with a workforce of people trained and educated on northern social work program.

Mr. Speaker, here we go again -- the fiscal restraint taken over without looking at the long-term picture of the Northwest Territories. The ill-advised cuts to Aurora College are misguided at best and downright silly at worst.

After seeing the approach the college has taken, I believe we need a review by an independent group and with a lot of input from all stakeholders, not just top administrators. While there are some great things about the college, more relevant programming, proper recruitment, improved staff morale, and more emphasis on northern courses would be a great start.

We need a social program in the NWT, and this decision is not acceptable. I will have questions for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment later on today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON DEH CHO REGION TOURISM AND PARKS

MR. NADLI: Mahsi. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Deh Cho region is one of the most spectacular in the Northwest Territories. Our territorial parks are the first people reach when they enter the NWT from either BC or Alberta.

Between campgrounds and day-use areas, parks in the Deh Cho area offer a variety of opportunities for recreation and relaxation. We are welcoming increasing numbers of visitors and want to ensure they enjoy their stay.

The government has worked hard to improve parks infrastructure and visitor experiences. For example, parks throughout the Northwest Territories now have more flexible operating dates to accommodate good weather at the end of the season. Great effort was put into the 60th Parallel Visitors' Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the Deh Cho is one of the most accessible parts of the NWT in terms of geography and climate. We need to keep doing all we can to attract visitors. At the same time, significant parcels of land in the Deh Cho are being advanced through the former Protected Areas Strategy process and now the Conservation Areas Network. We have an opportunity to look at the linkages between conservation areas and tourism and ways to incorporate parks into conservation areas.

Mr. Speaker, around the world we see wilderness being traded for commodities and traditional cultures assimilated by mass media and consumerism. Knowledge of the land and its value to the people who live there enhances people's

understanding of the need to protect it, along with traditional culture.

Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure dialogue continues between governments, communities, the business and tourism sectors as we look into opportunities to both conserve and develop our natural resources. Mr. Speaker, if you are visiting the NWT, you can't drive home without driving through the Deh Cho. Let's make sure people see things that make them want to come back again. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS FOR NUNAKPUT REGION

MR. NAKIMAYAK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, recently the NWT Help Line held its first group phone session. This session, ready to host up to 23 people, provided an opportunity for NWT residents to talk to experts and to hear from each other in a confidential and supportive setting, no matter where they were calling from.

The topic, too, was something that is sadly familiar to too many families across our territory: suicide and suicide awareness.

Programs like this, Mr. Speaker, and others such as Mental Health First Aid, sharing circles, and confidential online chats through the NWT Help Line Facebook page are vital for Northerners. Mr. Speaker, Inuit residents are particularly in need. Our neighbours in Nunavut have declared a suicide crisis in their region, and more broadly, Statistics Canada reported that nearly a quarter of Inuit have had suicidal thoughts at least once in their lives.

Inuit mental health, Mr. Speaker, is frequently challenged in our small communities. These communities are our homes, the traditional territory of our ancestors, but at the same time Canadian colonization has left deep wounds: the legacy of residential schools, addictions, and family violence.

Inuit are strong people, but even the strongest people cannot heal and thrive without dedicated community support and resources for the people. I am concerned, Mr. Speaker, that my riding of Nunakput and its communities of Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, Tuktoyaktuk, and Ulukhaktok, lack clear mental health support for youth, and in particular for Inuit men.

Research from Statistics Canada tells us that chronic health conditions and food security are "key predictors of mental health distress for Inuit men." This should come as no surprise, knowing, as everyone in the House must know, how difficult it is

to access fresh, healthy, and fairly priced food on a regular basis in remote communities.

Despite these factors, I am optimistic, Mr. Speaker. I am looking forward to the expansion of the essential services that the NWT Help Line offers. Knowing the needs we must meet is the first step, but we must continue to be vigilant and support all regions across the NWT when it comes to mental health. Quyanainni, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR AURORA COLLEGE

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak of recent developments with Aurora College and the announcement of the ending of two important programs for students enrolled in the education faculty, specifically in regards to the Social Work Diploma program.

In the 2014-15 fiscal year, 25 first-year students registered for this program. Out of those, six students graduated with diplomas and six graduates were hired or offered jobs immediately after ending their program. In fact, in the overall education program's division, full-time student enrolment has increased by 28 per cent in 2015-16. These are hopeful and positive results that there is traction for this program.

We have heard that enrolment is low and graduation rates are low as well, which is part of the rationale for terminating this. It seems like there is a lot of uptake and certainly a lot of interest currently from members of the public who are concerned about these changes. I, too, am concerned, Mr. Speaker. However, we have to look at the overall impact of the college. The college currently receives the bulk of our post-secondary education funding, yet full-time enrolment has decreased significantly, as have graduation rates.

These millions of dollars to support these anemic outcomes are awarded year on year, and yet now the college is increasing tuition by \$300 a year over the next two years, adding to the cost of living of students who have limited means to begin with.

For an institution that is supposedly at arm's length, Mr. Speaker, the Minister has enormous influence, including appointing the president and governors and more recently giving direction directly to the college. This is an opportunity for us to use this resource and properly to fund it.

Again, I call on the Minister to complete the strategic plan and start getting Aurora College moving in the right direction. We have seen College nordique have an exponential growth in interest. We have seen Dechinta University bring in half a million dollars from the federal government. Our private sector partners are doing well. Northerners want to learn. We need to make Aurora College a world-class institution, and we need to keep working on that, Mr. Speaker. I encourage, again, the Minister to work on the strategic plan and get it on the table in this House without delay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Members' statements. Item 4, returns to oral questions. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. BEAULIEU: Marci cho, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move to item 11 on the orders of the day, replies to Budget Address. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Unanimous consent granted

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

Replies to Budget Address

MR. NADLI'S REPLY

MR. NADLI: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would to thank my honourable colleagues for speaking before me on this very important matter. I want to take this time to offer my thoughts on the 2017-18 budget. As you know, my riding of the Deh Cho is made up of mostly small communities. I hope with my remarks today to represent the concerns of the people who live in my riding.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the budget should be about vision and leadership first, fiscal prudence second. It is very clear that our House is divided on the matter of fiscal priorities. On one hand, the Minister of Finance and Cabinet are fixated on fiscal restraint and debt management, while we on this side of the House want to ensure that the pressing needs of our people are met. For example, on a daily basis we hear about the needs of our constituents, of the critical need for accessible housing and programs, a responsive and compassionate healthcare system, and the desires for a better way of life through jobs and business opportunities.

I believe these are some of the challenges we all face. However, while we exalt the principles of working together in a consensus system, I don't see a genuine effort on the part of my Cabinet colleagues to work in a spirit of collaboration. It is very hard for me to accept the argument of fiscal

restraint when we've tried to work with Cabinet and propose initiatives and are told, "we'll look into it," and the concerns of our constituents are somehow lost in transit.

What is more disappointing is when we are told we have limited resources for projects and then, later on, Cabinet suddenly announces major investments in initiatives of their own. A case in point is the recent purchase of NTCL assets and expenditures of \$7 million that just magically appeared like manna from heaven. Another is the purchase of the defunct Cantung Mine property for \$4.5 million, another investment that wasn't in the government's business plan. Mr. Speaker, this lack of communication and transparency is not consistent with the principles of consensus government. It does not bode well for a positive working relationship between Cabinet and the Regular Members for the remainder of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the priorities put forth in this budget. This budget focuses more on debt management and less on key strategic investments. Our northern economy needs a boost in the allocation of key resources which can cause stimulus and job creation and business opportunities. At least there are positives in the form of continued efforts in infrastructure initiatives, including the Mackenzie Valley Fibre Optic Link Project, the completion of the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk Highway, and the recent announcement of the road to Whati, but there are still half-commitments that have been made, such as the junior kindergarten, which create more uncertainty.

To ensure we have a balanced approach to the budget, we have presented to our Cabinet colleagues requests for modest investment in initiatives that in total amount to less than 1 per cent of this \$1.7-billion budget. We have recommended the need for investments in employment funding to small communities, the enhancements of home care services to address the aging senior population, road access funding, and the stimulus package for job creation and business growth for small communities and regional centres. However, these requests are not reflected in this budget.

The 2017-18 budget was the product of a process that started in the business planning cycle. Mr. Speaker, it's not my first rodeo, and I've been through this process many times. Each department goes through internal planning and then presents the findings to their Ministers. Ministers and their senior officials then present the business plans to Regular MLAs and standing committees. As Regular MLAs, it's at this point that we become aware of the operations and maintenance and infrastructure projects scheduled for the upcoming fiscal year. What is important to note is it is at this

stage that as Regular MLAs we're given the opportunity to express the concerns of our constituents to each department. Generally, that is the process we have to work within, and we try to do it constructively and cooperatively.

It is a huge disappointment to me and to my colleagues on this side of the House when we see the Main Estimates and the modest investments we have requested are not there. Mr. Speaker, these modest investments would make a big, positive impact for our residents without affecting 1 per cent of the GNWT's bottom line. It is very hard for my colleagues and I on this side of the House to believe that our concerns are being heard when the government tells us that they cannot afford these investments while finding big dollars to bail out failing northern business ventures, no matter how important they might be.

I understand the fiscal priorities of this budget must be measured against the 18th Assembly mandate which was developed by all 19 MLAs when we were elected. The 18th Assembly mandate document commits us to work in the following key sectors of the NWT, including education, training and youth development; cost of living; community wellness and safety; economy; environment and climate change; and governance. Within this broad mandate, there is a lot of room for differing priorities. I believe we can do more to enhance tourism and the fishing industry, for example. No fiscal strategy should jeopardize the success of this government to complete its mandate.

I also believe that we can and must do more to ensure the timely settlement of outstanding land claims and self-government negotiations. At the beginning of the 18th Assembly, we all agreed that this is integral for the political and economic well-being of the Northwest Territories.

Because of devolution and the greater authority and power that come with it, there needs to be a bigger government to implement the lands and resource systems that we are now responsible for administering. If this budget is approved, it will reduce the size of government. Has the government looked at how this might impact our new responsibilities under devolution or how it might impact our work to settle outstanding lands, resources, and self-government negotiations?

I encourage the government not to lose sight of the importance of this work. I encourage the review of negotiating mandates that respect constitutional rights of First Nations and reflect the spirit of the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. My hope is that continued efforts are made to ensure the fair and just conclusion of land claims and self-government negotiations.

Mr. Speaker, let us be reminded that we seek roles in leadership because we want to make a difference in our families and communities. We all want to make things better for our communities. The time is now to make a change. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Replies to budget address. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN'S REPLY

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if the preparation of the budget for the last fiscal year was a sprint, quickly compiled after the election, budget preparation for the next fiscal year has been a marathon. We started in September and, despite intensive negotiations and some movement on both sides, we are at an impasse. This afternoon, I want to talk about some of the reasons we are stuck.

In my last Budget Address, I talked about some important and unfinished business around the mandate. We Members of the 18th Assembly do not have a common fiscal goal. This lack of consensus created division during the last budget, and it is fueling division again. The government wants to reduce spending in order to generate a cash surplus. This surplus would be invested in infrastructure. Specifically, the government suggested we cut \$150 million in spending over the life of this Assembly to create that surplus.

We Regular MLAs rejected the size of this cut, describing it as austerity for the NWT at a time when investment was needed instead. There has been some movement on this point. In his budget last week, the Finance Minister revised the scope of the cuts to \$100 million.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister is playing the long game with his fiscal strategy. While the cuts proposed in this budget will generate a small \$15 million surplus by next March, that surplus will grow to \$167 million by the end of our term. The Finance Minister will then be able to claim he has generated the first cash surplus in 10 years. To be clear, he is proposing to reverse the deficit the government spent 10 years creating in just four years. The question is: at what cost to the people of the NWT? We are back to our original question: do we need austerity or do we need investment?

We are looking at as many as 200 positions being eliminated this fiscal year and next, creating a major hit to the public service and to local economies throughout the Northwest Territories. As the reality of those losses combined with the slow-down of our economy sinks in, how do we reverse the flow of out migration? The number of people leaving the NWT is at nearly the same level it was during the recession of 2008. My answer to these

questions is simple: we can't afford to lose any more jobs or any more people because of decisions made by this government.

Mr. Speaker, I am now going to turn from the fiscal context to the budget itself. The budget isn't all bad news by any means. There are some important investments for residents of my riding, Yellowknife Centre. Downtown residents have been struggling with the effects of a growing population of people who are regularly intoxicated and who may also be homeless. While this population is mostly not from Yellowknife Centre originally, or even from Yellowknife, they have been drawn downtown by their needs and/or addictions. Until recently, our response to this population has been wholly inadequate, and I'm glad to say that's changing.

The location of the day shelter kitty-corner to the liquor store on 49th Street has been a source of bitter complaint, especially from some of my constituents who live at the Northern Heights condominiums on the same street. Among other unpleasant facts, they often encounter bodily waste on the street and verbal harassment when they enter the building or parking garage.

I appreciate the commitment by the Minister of Health and Social Services to move the day shelter as soon as another location is found. I am mindful, however, that the day shelter is unlikely to be welcomed anywhere because of a strong "not in my back yard" reaction to the people who use it.

Thanks to the good work done by the authors of the Yellowknife Homelessness Road Map Action Plan, an investment by both the City of Yellowknife and GNWT, progress on the long-standing problems downtown is at hand. The city has advertised for a service provider for the Street Outreach Service. It's my understanding that paid staff with a vehicle will circulate through downtown assisting individuals in need, and in some cases transporting them to the appropriate facility. I welcome the territorial government investment in a sobering centre as a destination for men and women who are intoxicated. I want to see the program implemented as soon as possible for the sake of those individuals who are intoxicated, as well as for those of us who live and work downtown.

I'm also encouraged to see a further investment in the emergency shelters to expand their capacity to offer semi-independent living. Mr. Speaker, Yellowknife Centre has a large population of seniors. They live at AVENS, Mary Murphy, and in their own homes. As a reminder, the population of seniors is growing like a forest fire on a hot, windy day and is now nearing its peak. The waiting list for the independent living units at AVENS is six years long, and there are waiting lists for the manor and

the dementia facility as well. We need to increase services to seniors now.

The Finance Minister's commitment to provide \$500,000 to low-income seniors for repairs to their homes is welcome, but it doesn't go nearly far enough. I suggest this amount of money could be spent in Yellowknife Centre alone. Its impact spread among 19 ridings will be negligible.

One of the investments MLAs on this side of the House want to see is an additional \$1.3 million to help seniors age in place. Not only do most seniors want to stay in their own homes for as long as possible, there are considerable savings for government if they make these investments, and all this money gets spent with local small contractors.

Mr. Speaker, Regular MLAs have heard the concerns of seniors about the need to increase homecare services, a key element to help seniors age in place. In a letter to MLAs last fall, the president of NWT Seniors wrote, and I quote:

"The field of homecare has been eroded in our territory to the point where frustration and worry about the future are common concerns expressed by patients, healthcare professionals, and homecare staff. We need a new influx of money to fill the gaps that exist in actualizing our priorities, such as aging in place."

These investments in caring for seniors need to be increased as soon as possible.

I want to touch on other welcome news. Yellowknife Centre residents, along with people across the NWT, will benefit from implementing a basic 911 emergency response service. Given all the time that Yellowknifers spend on trails and lakes around the city, residents will experience a greater peace of mind knowing that help is a phone call away.

Mr. Speaker, I heard from many Yellowknife residents in the last month about the need to fully fund the implementation of junior kindergarten. Their argument was clear and compelling: another year of school should not be added at the expense of students in kindergarten to grade 12. I'm pleased the Minister heard this message and agreed to fully fund education for four-year-olds starting this September. There are still some loose ends around the need to spend more on busing, extending inclusive schooling to junior kindergarten, and accommodating other service providers who work with the four-year-olds, but I'll expand on these issues at another time.

Mr. Speaker, residents in Yellowknife Centre and across the NWT find that their spending power has been diminished. The price of rent, electricity, and food are big drivers of the cost of living here in Yellowknife. Many families have trouble making

ends meet even when both parents work full-time. I'm hopeful that the new NWT Child Benefit will supplement the advantage of the Canada Child Benefit in reducing poverty, especially among children.

As I mentioned a few minutes ago, it's a sad fact that one in five children in the NWT lives in poverty. We can't expect them to realize their full potential while their family struggles with hunger and providing them with other necessities. The new NWT Child Benefit is expected to reach 1,600 families with an income of less than \$80,000 a year. That's a step in the right direction, as is the proposed increase in income assistance allowances to cover the higher prices of food and other necessities.

Mr. Speaker, Regular MLAs wanted to see additional investments in budget 2017. The gap between what the government is offering and Regular MLAs have requested is worth about \$10 million, or 0.6 per cent of the total \$1.7 billion budget. This is a small number for such a great gulf from achieving consensus. In addition to the initiatives I've already mentioned, we want to see an additional half a million dollars added to the Anti-Poverty Fund. As I mentioned just now, the fund provides small grants to grass-roots organizations across the NWT to respond to poverty at the local level.

Mr. Speaker, applications for funding outstripped money available by a ratio of 4:1 last year. As I said in my statement today, no real change in the multi-generational cycle of poverty will be achieved until we invest in reducing the number of people who live in poverty.

Mr. Speaker, we also want to see a half-million dollar investment in suicide prevention funding. There were a number of suicides across the territory last year; an indication of the pervasiveness of mental health needs, especially among youth. These issues are often driven by addictions, so we need to be able to address mental health and addictions together. We need to improve our response to this cry for help by our young people as soon as possible.

Regular MLAs also wanted to see an additional \$600,000 investment to create a mobile delivery model for a healing program that assists men who have used violence in their intimate relationships.

Mr. Speaker, we also want to see almost \$3 million invested in ITI to benefit businesses of all kinds, from assistance to junior mining companies through the Mining Incentive Program to offsetting the costs of freight the fishermen pay on their catch.

Mr. Speaker, 146 businesses opened in Yellowknife in 2015, according to city statistics. Small business is a key driver of our economy, and Regular MLAs propose to support that growth with an additional \$1.2 million investment in the Support for Entrepreneurs and Economic Development, or SEED, program. Anyone who has attempted to open a small business will appreciate our call to reduce the administrative complexity of establishing a new business.

Mr. Speaker, MLAs on this side also wanted \$1 million invested in local access roads and \$1.5 million for the Arctic Energy Alliance to expand its work to low-income families and communities outside Yellowknife. All of these investments respond to the priorities we set out in our mandate to increase energy efficiency and reduce the cost of living.

Mr. Speaker, we also wanted the government to roll back a little more than half of the proposed reductions, at a cost of about \$15 million. The Finance Minister didn't detail the reductions in his Budget Address, but they are available in the Main Estimates, and the Main Estimates are online at the Department of Finance. There, you will see a \$2.3 million cut in funding to schools and a \$1.9 million cut to Aurora College, cuts to environmental monitoring, and cuts to funding for small business startups, and the list goes on. The biggest cut is to the government's workforce. A total of 65 positions will be eliminated by this budget, 45 of them in Yellowknife.

Mr. Speaker, the loss of these positions is a disaster for the city, coming as it does in addition to a year of grim announcements by the diamond mining companies. In November, Dominion Diamond Corporation announced it was moving its corporate headquarters to Calgary in order to save \$19 million a year in operating costs. The company said the move would impact 100 staff. Outgoing CEO Brendan Bell is just one of many people who had to make a decision to stay or go. I know of several families who agonized over this choice, what it meant to their school-aged children, their extended family living in the North, and their employment prospects. While the GNWT didn't comment on this decision, I want to say it was a blow to Yellowknife Centre, where the office is located. The DDC staff is part of our community. They sing in the choir, they volunteer for non-profits, and they coach minor sports. They pay taxes, and Ottawa calculates territorial formula financing based on their presence here. The loss of these jobs, along with the closure of the De Beers corporate office in 2015 and layoffs at the mines, have taken as many as 500 jobs out of the NWT.

The last thing Yellowknife needs is more job losses, Mr. Speaker, yet budget 2017-18 delivers 45 more

cuts to positions in Yellowknife. Not all of these jobs are currently filled, but the loss of these well-paid positions is bad news.

All of the fallout I just spoke about in connection with DDC is true for the community wherein government jobs are lost. Axing them represents a loss of taxpayers and reduces the level of territorial formula financing available to GNWT. I appreciate the programs sunset or otherwise need to be replaced, but cutting these positions rather than re-profiling them will increase out-migration and the financial consequences that go with it. Mr. Speaker, it's a sad fact that people who get laid off in Yellowknife tend to leave. They can't afford to live here without a job.

To summarize, we want an additional \$10 million investment in our mandate, a sum equivalent to less than 1 per cent of total spending. We also want a rollback on \$15 million of the proposed cuts, which again is less than 1 per cent. I repeat that this is a pretty small list of asks, but one Cabinet has been unwilling to work with Regular Members to achieve.

After months of discussion and negotiation, we are at an impasse, which I mentioned at the beginning. When we wanted changes to the mandate, we moved the necessary motions here in the House, and that's what we're prepared to do with this budget. Eliminating a 10-year deficit in four years is simply not a realistic goal. The cost of reaching it is going to do more harm than good for the people of my riding and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, I have some final thoughts about the budget cycle. It occupies a tremendous amount of time by departmental staff, the executive council, and Regular MLAs. This is time that could be spent on another of our roles that has been neglected in this Assembly: reviewing and improving legislation. As we heard from my colleague Mr. O'Reilly last week, the backlog in legislation required is years long. Not even a year into our mandate, the government told the City of Yellowknife that a number of minor amendments to legislation affecting municipalities will not be introduced during this Assembly. At the rate we've been going, this pace is the norm, not the exception.

Mr. Speaker, I recommend that Regular MLAs study alternatives to the way we now produce budgets, with input from stakeholders of all kind, including our colleagues on the other side of the House. If there is a way to free up time to make the budget process more efficient and to find more time to work on legislation, we should take it. Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to where I started. We don't have consensus on our fiscal position, and until we're able to change that, we're going to keep

spinning our wheels on the scope of spending reductions we can all support. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Replies to Budget Address, day 4 of 7. There appear to be no further replies to Budget Address for today, so we'll turn to item number 4, returns to oral questions. Item 5, recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member for Nunakput.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

MR. NAKIMAYAK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to welcome Mr. Richard Ross, who is my high school friend and one of the most supportive dads I know, and also coach and mentor for youth in the Mackenzie Delta. Thank you and welcome, Richard. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. VANTHUYNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, earlier Yellowknife North resident Ben Nind was here. Ben Nind is the executive director for the Giant Mine Oversight Board. He is certainly a well-respected community supporter and a big contributor to the creative arts community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member for Deh Cho.

MR. NADLI: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize two pages from Deh Gah School from Fort Providence. Nyssa Mackenzie and Shannan Bonnetrouge, along with their chaperone Trisha Landry will be here this week from February 6 to 9. I'd like to encourage my colleagues in joining me and welcoming them to the Legislative Assembly. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Item 6, acknowledgements. Item 7, oral questions. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 510-18(2): IMPACTS OF POVERTY ON HEALTH INDICATORS

MR. BEAULIEU: Marci, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services on my Member's statement. When it comes to NWT's health performance, we publicly measure things like diabetes, immunization, school readiness, smoking, obesity, but we don't track poverty. My first question for the Minister is, pillar two of the action plan to reduce and eliminate poverty in NWT is healthy living and reaching our potential. Can the Minister expand on some of the

department's achievements in this area during the 18th Assembly, and how these relate directly to poverty and poverty's health impact? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, addressing poverty, as the Member is aware, certainly is the responsibility of all departments, all boards and agencies, as well as NGOs and individuals themselves. The Department of Health and Social Services can do things to help individuals combat poverty here in the Northwest Territories. There's a large list, but I'll just touch on a couple of the things that we're doing.

Throughout the Northwest Territories, we've been holding community health fairs to help people understand the types of things we all need to be doing, making healthy choices to support healthy living, which ultimately can support them in their fight against poverty.

There has also been a significant amount of federal dollars that have flowed through the Department of Health and Social Services to the individual communities throughout the Northwest Territories to support community wellness, and different activities that are being undertaken by the different communities themselves, community-driven, to help address issues in the communities. Often, poverty is on that list.

Mr. Speaker, in this budget, this government has made commitments through the Department of Health and Social Services to help combat things around poverty, such as putting in a sobering centre here in the Northwest Territories. It's not just the Department of Health and Social Services, as I've said. This government is committing \$3 million this year and ongoing to support small business opportunities in communities. JK is fully funded and will be fully funded as of September. This is supporting poverty reduction in the Northwest Territories. We have \$22 million, up \$2 million this year, being available in income support to help address poverty in the Northwest Territories, but I do take the Member's point on impacts on health, and we take those very seriously. We do have a territorial action plan that we refer to on a regular basis and, as we're making decisions on programs, we think about the impacts they will have on our residents to help reduce things like poverty. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. BEAULIEU: I hope the Minister hasn't answered all my questions with the first response.

---Laughter

Thank you. How does an understanding of poverty as a health determinant currently factor into the department's policies and planning?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: The Member had a very comprehensive Member's statement today which I think addressed many of the issues that are being faced by residents across the Northwest Territories, and I appreciate the content of that statement.

Poverty, as I think the Member has clearly articulated, is a very complex issue with many contributing factors, and there is no single solution. I think that goes to MLA Green's comment about how I always respond to poverty questions. At its most fundamental level, Mr. Speaker, the department priorities and planning in the health and social services are grounded on a population health approach. A population health approach has as one of its fundamental considerations the fact that poverty is linked to health. So in our planning and design of programs and services, the consideration of poverty is built into the work that we are doing as a Department of Health and Social Services. It is also built into the work that Education, Culture and Employment is doing, as well as the Housing Corporation, so it is something that is being done by Health and Social Services and in cooperation with other departments in our government.

MR. BEAULIEU: How can the department share poverty-related health information with other GNWT departments and other Ministers to improve the whole government's approach to eliminating poverty?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: In the last government, the government, in cooperation with NGOs, Aboriginal governments, community governments, and other stakeholders, put together an anti-poverty framework. One of the things that has frustrated me about that important work, and it was important work and I appreciate all the work the stakeholders have put in, but it is something we hear time and time again. Number one, there is no evaluation criteria established for any of the work being done on addressing poverty in the Northwest Territories. Number two, there was no real agreed-upon definition of what poverty is.

These are things that came up at the last anti-poverty round table again. It's my belief, and we need to work together as an Assembly to figure out how to move forward on this, that we do need a definition of poverty in the Northwest Territories so that we have something that we can actually measure ourselves against. Also, we had discussions; we haven't established things that we need to evaluate that do need to be based on something, and a definition would go a long way to making that happen.

The bottom line is we aren't evaluating our programs against poverty, and I have no information to provide about success. I could tell you how many programs we have run. I could tell you from an education point of view how many people are on income support, but I cannot tell you the success rate in reducing poverty that our programs have. We have to continue to work with our stakeholders to identify and develop that criteria. Then we need to start tracking it so over the years we will be able to provide that information to tailor our programs to meet those outcomes.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. BEAULIEU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in my Member's statement, I spoke about the Department of Justice doing an integrated case management approach that they have completed recently. I was wondering if the Minister could tell me: what does the Minister think about piloting an integrated case management approach to poverty and health in our small communities, maybe to start with, on the pilot? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member is asking for the Minister's opinion, but I will allow the Minister to answer.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Member is asking for my opinion on something that I haven't actually had any discussion with the Member on. I'm not sure exactly what the Member means by an "integrated case management approach" to this particular challenge that we face across the Northwest Territories. I would be happy if the Member were to send me something from committee and himself outlining exactly what he's talking about so that I can get informed, so that I could therefore develop an opinion.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member for Nahendeh.

QUESTION 511-18(2):
PROPOSED ELIMINATION OF SOCIAL WORK
DIPLOMA PROGRAM

MR. THOMPSON: Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment answered our colleague from Kam Lake that he heard about the news from the college that the social work program was being cut. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please tell this House when he heard the social work program was going to be phased out? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The college was provided a budget reduction target, and those discussions happened back in September. In cooperation and consultation with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, the college identified a number of proposed reductions to look at meeting this target, and that was known to me in November 2016 and was confirmed in December, and then they became part of the main estimates. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. THOMPSON: I would like to thank the Minister for his answer. Mr. Speaker, as I said in my address about the budget, communication is poor. Thursday was another example of why I say we have poor communication in this House. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please advise the House when we on this side will get a full briefing on why this program was phased out?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: I would be pleased to sit down with committee and discuss some of these reductions within the college at the convenience of committee, whenever there is time. I would be more than happy to do that.

MR. THOMPSON: I would like to thank the Minister for his answer. That is encouraging. Mr. Speaker, in my Member's statement, I spoke about how the college communicated with its students via e-mail. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please advise this House if the college has a communication policy that they use when informing students about changes and if this policy was adhered to on Thursday?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Aurora College does not have a specific communications policy in regards to informing students of changes in programming. Aurora College does operate on the principle that students should be provided as much notice as possible in regards to changes, and students are normally provided information via e-mail. We feel at this time, in terms of the program and phasing out the program, plenty of time.

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

MR. THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Minister for his answer. I may disagree. Communication via e-mail is probably not the process I would do, and I would actually encourage the staff at the college to work with the students and tell them face up and tell them what is going on.

As I said in my Member' statement today, the college has decided that this will be the last year for intake for Northerners wishing to take the social

work program. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister advise this House what will happen to the students who are taking this access program presently to get ready for the social work program? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Aurora College has met with each of the five access students who are going to be impacted. These private meetings were to discuss options, both at the Aurora College for other possible programming or other post-secondary institutions, depending on what the students' career path needs are, and interests, so they have met with them to move forward and helping them look at where they want to go in their career. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 512-18(2):
NWT HELP LINE MENTAL HEALTH
COUNSELLING SERVICES

MR. NAKIMAYAK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier I spoke about mental health in Nunakput, and my questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services about the NWT Help Line program. Mr. Speaker, my first question to the Minister is: can the Minister provide any preliminary observations from the first night of group phone sessions, for instance, the number of people who called in and if this program has started to positively impact Northerners in need? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, before I get into the details, I just would like to point out that this was the first delivery of this model. There was some advertising for it, but clearly there wasn't enough. At this point, we are not panicked, but we do have to do some more communication. Mr. Speaker, the first delivery was January 30th. We had two people registered. Neither of them called in. At the end of the day, we had nobody call in to that group help line. As I said, we are not panicked yet, but we recognize we have to do some better communication to get that information out there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. NAKIMAYAK: I appreciate the response. My second question is: how are these new programs, including group phone sessions and confidential Facebook chat sessions, prepared to respond to unique cultural needs like those of Inuit Northerners?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: To ensure that the care coaches -- those are the individuals who actually respond to the calls and are participating in

the group counselling -- are ready to work with residents of the Northwest Territories, information is provided to them on a regular basis about the Northwest Territories; the realities, region by region, of the types of challenges that are being faced; the number of suicides; other mental health challenges; as well as some of the community realities so that they are aware of those realities. They also have a number of local resources that they can call in, the health and social services centres, as an example, in order to get additional information on the communities that they are talking to residents from. There are a number of ways that we are trying to make sure that those individuals have some cultural context, some northern context, and understand the realities that our residents are facing when they call in.

MR. NAKIMAYAK: The Minister may have answered my next question, but just for clarity, my final question is: what other culturally-appropriate mental health supports are currently available for Northerners across the Northwest Territories?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: There are a couple of different things that are happening. One, as an example, departmental staff attended an invitation-only event, We Belong, which is an international forum on life promotion to address Indigenous suicide, in November 2016, which was hosted by the Canadian Foundation for Health Care Improvement. We had an opportunity to go and learn and bring back some of the information from those and apply it to programs across the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, the department also continues to deliver on-the-land healing fund for mental health and addictions, which goes to different Aboriginal governments across the Northwest Territories. We are of the opinion that those Aboriginal governments and the Aboriginal people are far better positioned than we are to deliver on-the-land programming, so we are providing them support to do that. We have committed to providing technical expertise or resources, e.g. staff, when they request it. We want to be partners, but we accept that it is their design and their implementation.

Then the department has also recently released a report on building a culturally-respectful health and social services system, trying to improve some of the cultural competencies of staff throughout the Northwest Territories so that, when they are dealing with individuals from small, rural, and remote communities, or even larger communities, they understand the cultural context and are able to provide the best, most respectful care and service possible.

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

QUESTION 513-18(2):
SALE OF MACTUNG MINING PROPERTY

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, monsieur le President. It was a difficult call today, but I guess I have to go with some questions on Mactung. These will be questions for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment. When he was down in Vancouver for the Roundup Mining Conference, did he put all of his colleagues to work and have a big sign saying "Mactung for sale" on the GNWT booth down there? Masi, Mr. Speaker.

---Laughter

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

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, the sign said "unlock your potential; the NWT resources are for sale." All kidding aside, when we were down there, we had an opportunity, like I said last week in the House, to talk to a number of people, be it prospectors, finance companies, mining industry, potential mining companies. The Mactung property was also brought up in a conversation of where we are at with that property and what we are doing moving forward on it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks for the response. Is there actually a plan to sell this property? The folks on this side of the House have not seen anything. Is there a plan? Is there a sale price? What is going on with this property? Can the Minister tell this side of the House what is going on?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: At present, right now, the Department of ITI is working with the Northwest Territories Geological Survey and we are looking at expanding our geological knowledge on the Mactung property.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks to the Minister for that response. During our review of the departmental budget in Committee of the Whole last year, I asked if we could have some folks go over there to take a look at the site for any potential environmental liabilities. Can the Minister tell this House whether, indeed, there was a visit to the site and what kind of environmental liabilities were found? Can he make that report public because it would have to be disclosed to any potential buyers?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: The Department of Lands conducted a site assessment on the Mactung property in August 2016. Those results were actually shared with standing committee already.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the answer from the Minister. Great that it has been shared with this House, but can he make this report public? It would obviously have to be disclosed to any potential buyers for the site. What are the actual financial liabilities associated with the environmental issues with the property? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have to talk to my colleagues in the Department of Lands and see what information they can share. If it is possible, we will share that with committee. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 514-18(2):
JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN IMPLEMENTATION

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, my questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment and they are based on a statement that he gave today. I just want to confirm, to start with, that the provision of JK in every school in the Northwest Territories is mandatory as of September of this year. Is that correct? Thank you.

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

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are intending to roll out junior kindergarten in all the schools across the Northwest Territories this fall school year. I just want to emphasize again that it is optional for parents and families to enrol their kids. Thank you.

MS. GREEN: School boards are now developing their budgets for the next school year. One of the tasks that they have is to decide on their staffing component. If they are going to release teachers, they need to be released by the end of March. If they need to hire teachers, they need to know that as well. If the money is not going to be available until the fall, how are school boards going to plan for the implementation of junior kindergarten this fall?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As I mentioned, it is a really good news story that this government has stepped up to fully fund junior kindergarten. The next step, after we made the announcement from the budget address, was that our department is meeting with superintendents and working with the school boards to look at how we're going to be rolling out junior kindergarten this fall, and also looking at how we're going to be able to utilize that money that was announced in the budget.

MS. GREEN: I did not hear a definitive answer to my question. So schools are now planning. School boards in Yellowknife are holding open houses this month to talk to parents about coming to their schools to access junior kindergarten, and they have a target number of involvements in mind for each of the school boards, so there are lots of pieces of this puzzle that are known. So can the boards count on having this funding in hand or committed to the penny by the end of March?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As I mentioned after the Budget Address, we did reach out to the superintendents and we're working with the school boards to see how we're going to roll out this funding, and we did make that commitment to fully fund junior kindergarten, so those are discussions that are happening right now.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister commit to making sure that all the money is in place to fund junior kindergarten in every NWT school by the end of March? Thank you.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Based on enrolments and how many students are going to be in the school system, we are going to be fully funding junior kindergarten this fall. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 515-18(2):
STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR AURORA
COLLEGE

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we've had a lot of discussion about Aurora College in the past, and building a sound post-secondary education system in the Northwest Territories. The Minister recently mentioned that reduction targets were passed along to Aurora College. Who set those targets? Was it the Department of Education, Culture and Employment or was the department somehow involved in setting those reduction targets? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Right across government we're looking at how we can better spend our dollars more efficiently and, you know, evaluating the overall costs of programming is part of good planning and management. Some of the programs with very few graduates and a full complement of staff is not fiscally responsible. The department did work with Aurora College to see where we can

better efficiently spend our dollars through the contribution agreements that we have with them and those targets were set by that.

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, the government through the Department of Education, Culture and Employment provides contribution agreements to other post-secondary partners as well. Does the Minister or the department have the same relationship with those other organizations, like College nordique and Dechinta? Do they work with them on value for money on their contribution agreements or are those contributions agreements given to those organizations and they're allowed to compete in the free market, so to speak?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Yes, we do have those contribution agreements with other institutions, such as College nordique and Dechinta, and we do look at increased funding with those organizations as well moving forward.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. I'm sure those partners will be interested in receiving additional funding from the Minister moving forward. In this specific area of reduction, the Minister spoke about value for money. How many students were enrolled in the social work program, and what is the cost per student of that program so we can get a clear sense of the value for money?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Over the last three years we've had 12 graduates come out of that program. Currently, there are 17 students who are enrolled in year one and 17 students enrolled in year two. We're working with them and continue to support them through the rest of their studies. If you simply divide the cost of the program by the number of students, the cost is approximately about \$13,000 per student. However, if you look at it from an academic outcome perspective, how many students are we graduating, that would be about \$112,000 per graduate that we put through that program.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister for those numbers. I think we all want to ensure we are getting value for money for our dollars and making the biggest impact. The students involved in this program, it's called a life-changing program and it gives them real opportunities. So with an eye to that, does the Minister agree that this program, while not a full degree and perhaps not performing at full efficiency, will the Minister agree that this does give Northerners the opportunities to receive academic credentials to enter degree programs down south that may be lost if it wasn't available? What I mean by that is, yes, there are social work programs in universities and colleges across the country, but

often they're hard to access from someone from a very small traditional community in the Northwest Territories. So does the Minister agree that we may be losing something, and is there a plan from the college to substitute this through some other stream? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: The Social Work Diploma program, like many other Aurora College programs, is recognized by southern institutions and post-secondary institutions as well through transfer agreements and through individual course equivalency processes. With the strategic plan that we're going to be looking at having developed this year, hopefully we will see other programming fit, reflective of the Skills 4 Success action plan that we have and strategy that we have, as well as the Labour Market Information Report that we tabled in the House last year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 516-18(2): SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORTS

MR. MCNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in my statement I had mentioned supporting projects there for the small community industry. My first question to the Minister of ITI is: what is this government doing to support the small business, and more specifically in the Sahtu? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government invests daily into small businesses with all the stuff that we do in the Department of ITI for sure. We have targeted policies, programs, funding initiatives that we use. Last year we spent \$18.7 million in grants and contributions to entrepreneurs and businesses in the NWT and groups with economic interests that operate within the NWT. We also have the SEED program, which I believe, if I check department records, we spend around \$500,000 that is distributed within the Sahtu region alone.

Additionally, we provide an annual contribution to the Sahtu Business Development Corporation for programs and services that help support small businesses within the Member's region. So there are a number of things that we do and we will continue to do in the Sahtu.

MR. MCNEELY: I'm hearing a lot about money, but can the Minister offer an example of how it is actually supporting the working of delivery of programs to the owners of the Sahtu?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: We are proud of the one-widow, one-to-one service that we provide in all the regions of the Northwest Territories. There's one in Norman Wells; its doors are open from 8:30 to 5:00 on a weekly basis for entrepreneurs to come in and access that.

I mentioned the Community Transfer Initiative; it was in place for economic development officers in Tulita and Norman Wells down in Fort Good Hope. They help residents with funding applications, establish business contacts by linking them for advice and training and to help them bring their new ideas forward.

MR. MCNEELY: More specifically, can the Minister elaborate a little bit on the next 12 months coming up on various conferences that are on the schedule that could be passed on to the residents of the Sahtu on workshops, for example, orientation between the program and what is available, that type of conference or workshops? Anything that's scheduled for the next coming 12 months?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: In the Sahtu, we have a number of things that are going on. As far as right off the top of my head on conferences and stuff, I can't think of one that's coming up here in the short term. The one thing that I can speak about that's happening in the Sahtu region is the recent announcement of the Canyon Creek project. That's a good example of providing training and opportunities to residents in the Sahtu. That's going to bring approximately 50 jobs to the region. Also, in the last two years, ITI has worked with the people in the Sahtu to do the wire cleanup on the Canol Trail. There are two years done on that initiative, and we are encouraging the federal government to continue this project in the region this coming summer, to work on that, as it is going to bring a valuable trained workforce that has been trained in the region for future remediation of the Canol Trail.

Those are some of the initiatives that are happening right now in the region. I'll have to check with the department and see what other type of conferences and stuff we are trying to propose to bring to the region.

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

MR. MCNEELY: My last question, Mr. Speaker: can the Minister provide that information to my office so I can relate that on to the Sahtu leadership? Thank you.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Yes. Once the department has pulled that information together, Mr. Speaker, we will provide that to the Member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Deh Cho.

QUESTION 517-18(2):
DEH CHO REGION TOURISM AND PARKS

MR. NADLI: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment. Recently, it was stated that there is an increase of visitors to the territorial parks all over the NWT. Now, those are great parks that we have, and we have six of them in my riding, so my question is: has ITI considered the possible links between territorial recreational parks and conservation areas? Mahsi.

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

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Territorial parks are developed to promote recreational and economic development opportunities across the Northwest Territories, and we will continue to do that. The GNWT is led by the Department of ENR for our conservation network planning, and that includes both protected areas and conservation areas. They will be bringing that forward, their long-term strategy of doing that, and bringing their conservation areas with their plan forward on ecosystems and biodiversity. We will continue to work with them as a department on helping them support that. Our Territorial Parks Act, like I say, is based on recreation and economic development opportunities across the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. NADLI: I think the territorial parks are great opportunities. I think we do not too bad of a job maintaining them. They are something that communities look forward to every year in terms of maintaining and, of course, having visitors, as well, but sometimes we get our backs against the wall. We could do discussion and then we have walls, and we have to overcome those walls. I think the Minister just alluded to that, perhaps. Hopefully, it doesn't happen, that possibility. What are we doing to maintain an ongoing dialogue between ENR and ITI on the development of parks?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: As I said, ITI is responsible for territorial wayside parks. They were more for economic development than regional use. ENR is currently moving forward with their conservation of protected areas, and they are going to be coming forward with new legislation. When legislation is proposed, they have interdepartmental working groups that go through all these things, and these initiatives will be coming forward as it's a government-wide initiative. We look forward to them bringing their LPs forward on this, so we will continue to work with them.

MR. NADLI: I think the increase of visitors to the park is a great opportunity for this government, plus communities, as well. My question to the Minister is: how are Deh Cho communities involved in the development of parks and tourism in the region?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: All our six parks are in the South Slave, as the Member alluded to that are in his riding -- or, actually, in the South Slave, I guess. We continue to work with all Aboriginal groups and communities on how we are going to expand, how do we maintain and work with them, and how do we work with the community governments and Aboriginal governments to bring more economic opportunities based around tourism. We will continue to have that dialogue with all stakeholders in the region and across the Northwest Territories on how to improve that. We will continue to do that.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Deh Cho.

MR. NADLI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is reassuring that there is a commitment in terms of working with communities. My final question is: how are Deh Cho parks tied into Aboriginal tourism initiatives in the NWT? Mahsi.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Aboriginal tourism is a great initiative that ITI has put forward. We will continue to work with anyone who accesses this program. There are a couple of initiatives there for community governments to access that. As I have said, the Department of ITI will continue to work with everybody, be it Aboriginal tourism, communities, Aboriginal governments, residents of the Northwest Territories, on how we can enhance and use our parks to the best benefit to the residents of the Northwest Territories and all the visitors that come here. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 518-18(2):
FOOD SECURITY CHALLENGES

MR. VANTHUYNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, earlier today I spoke about food security and mostly around economic opportunities, as well as driving down the cost of living, but we also know that food security is very important to us as it relates to our health and well-being and our nutrition, to all of our communities here, in the North.

My questions today are for the Minister of Health, and I would like to ask the Minister if the Department of Health has any kind of policy or strategy currently in place as it relates to food security and nutrition? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when it comes to nutrition in the Northwest Territories, the Department of Health and Social Services through Public Health is trying to educate people across the Northwest Territories on healthy choices, healthy eating, and how it relates to overall health and well-being.

As far as a food security policy, we don't have a food security policy within the department. We're more focused on education and having people understand the value and importance of eating good food. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. VANTHUYNE: That's interesting to know, because I think that as a territory in understanding food security we need to kind of get off just nutrition and understand a little bit better what the broader scope of food security is. To that effect, I'll just talk about food in general.

Does the Minister know some of the challenges, or I'll refer to it as "gaps," that are currently in food security as a determinant of health for First Nations communities, particularly in the area of nutrition?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: I don't think we are differing in our opinions around the broader scope of food security and the value of that as it supports health for residents across the Northwest Territories. As I said, we focus on encouraging people to live healthy lifestyles. We do that through our Healthy Family programs. We do that through the education that we are supporting in the Department of Education in the schools around healthy living, healthy eating, and the value of nutrition.

Mr. Speaker, in the information that we provide across the Northwest Territories when we are attending our health fairs or our community health fairs, we are also talking about traditional foods and eating the foods that are available in our communities, whether it is wildlife or some of the other product that grows in the territory, so we're trying to encourage people to live their traditional means when it comes to food, as well.

We understand as a government that there are food security issues and challenges across the Northwest Territories. ITI has been progressive in supporting different programs to help start up community gardens and other mechanisms to get kids out hunting, get people pursuing game when appropriate, when it's available. I know we are facing challenges around caribou. Those things exist, and we are working together as a government. It's not just one department. It has to be all departments working together.

MR. VANTHUYNE: I thank the Minister for his reply. He is doing a good job today at answering forthcoming questions. I want to thank the Minister because he, in fact, did answer my question, which was about what contribution traditional knowledge is playing in food security. I am glad to hear that a number of the initiatives that they are putting out with regard to educating folks on nutrition and good health and well-being is around traditional foods, especially for our First Nations communities. That is very welcomed commentary from the Minister, and it is well appreciated. Thank you, Mr. Speaker

MR. SPEAKER: I heard that as a comment. Masi. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 519-18(2):
JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN IMPLEMENTATION

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of ECE. Mr. Speaker, in his statement today, the Minister said, and I quote, "we will make the money they need to implement junior kindergarten available to them when it is needed." Could the Minister please tell me what the phrase, "when it is needed" means? Thank you.

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

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those discussions, we are having right now with the departments and all the boards. If it is needed this fall, we will make sure that that funding is available, as I mentioned in the statement. We could be coming back for a sup to make sure that funding is available. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: Is the Minister aware that hiring and layoff plans need to be in place by the end of March? Money will need to be in place to make those decisions. Is the Minister aware of that?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As I mentioned, staff at the department have been meeting with the superintendents to make sure that it is a smooth transition as we roll out junior kindergarten moving forward. All those are being discussed right now, as I mentioned earlier.

MS. GREEN: The district education authorities and school boards were looking at making a cut of 3.6 per cent to their budget for the next school year in order to fund junior kindergarten from within. Now the government is fully funding junior kindergarten, will this cut be necessary?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As a government, we fund all our education authorities to the tune of about \$152 million. What they do with that money is decisions based on the board. That is something

that the board is going to have to make, that decision, moving forward.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear an answer to my question. My question is whether the school boards will still be required to use their own resources to implement junior kindergarten as they were required to do prior to the budget being announced last week, including a cut of 3.6 per cent of their K to grade 12 funding. Is this cut still going to be necessary now that full funding for JK is in place? Thank you.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As we have all heard here, this government is committed to fully funding junior kindergarten. The reductions that the Member is asking is a decision on the school boards themselves, and that is something that they are going to have to go back and look at. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 520-18(2):
JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN IMPLEMENTATION

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Nailing down this junior kindergarten funding issue is almost as slippery as a dead fish. Congratulations to the Minister; he had a good statement today about full funding. That full funding for junior kindergarten, is it going to include two things, inclusive schooling money for junior kindergarten students and busing costs? Will it include those two things? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we have staff at the department, after this announcement was made, reaching out to the superintendents as well as the school boards to start having those discussions about safety, about busing. Those discussions, as I mentioned, are happening right now, so we are going to have to wait to see what comes out of that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Can the Minister tell us, this magical mystery meeting of ECE staff and the education authority chairs, has this actually been scheduled? What is the date of this meeting?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Just day-to-day operations. We always meet with our organizations that we do fund. This is just day-to-day operations and meetings. Once the announcement came out,

we had to go out and talk to superintendents to get input on this new budget announcement that was addressed earlier on in this sitting. They are just day-to-day operations that we always have, meetings with superintendents.

MR. O'REILLY: I believe I heard the Minister say last week in this House that he was going to personally attend this meeting. Is that the case anymore?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Yes, when we have time, I will be getting out and having discussions with the superintendents as well as the boards to make sure we do have that smooth transition and roll-out of junior kindergarten.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the Minister. It doesn't sound like there is going to be one meeting where everybody is in the same room. I will try it one more time: how can the Minister say that junior kindergarten is going to be fully funded by GNWT when there are still these two outstanding issues, whether there is going to be inclusive funding for junior kindergarten students and the busing issue has not been resolved? How can the Minister say that it is fully funded? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As I mentioned, we give out about \$152 million to all the boards. Those budgetary items that the Member is bringing up, those are decisions made by the school boards themselves on how they allocate the dollars that we give to them. Those are decisions made by the school boards. As I mentioned, our staff is meeting on an ongoing basis with the superintendents to make sure that this roll-out of junior kindergarten is as smooth as possible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiillideh.

QUESTION 521-18(2):
PROPOSED ELIMINATION OF THE TEACHER
EDUCATION PROGRAM

MR. BEAULIEU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have questions for the Minister of Education on the cuts to the Teacher Education Program, although it is not recent and I know that the cuts were determined last year. However, it is now that the students are getting word that the cuts are there, that the program will be shut down in the future. What needs to happen in order for the department to reconsider cutting that program out at this point? Thank you.

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

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, Aurora College does have the autonomy to make these decisions when they are looking at reductions. As I mentioned earlier, when we have low enrolment rates, low graduation rates, but we still have a full staff, those are decisions that we have to look at, how we spend our dollars more efficiently, the tax-payer dollars. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. BEAULIEU: No one from Aurora College with their full autonomy is here to answer questions on why they are doing cuts, so I ask the Minister. Because the process is a longer process and we were looking at it last year, and we are looking at 2020 as to when the TEP program would end. That's not even in this government. Although they have autonomy, my understanding is that there would be some sort of a strategic plan in place. Prior to finalizing these decisions, if the strategic plan is completed by the college and there's some indication that this program could be saved, would the department work with Aurora College to continue the Teacher Education Program?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: We are still waiting for that strategic plan, so we're not sure what's in it yet. Once we do find the strategic plan is developed, we will share it with committee to move forward. I still have to say that we do have one of the best Student Financial Assistance programs in the country, and we continue to support our students who want to go and get an education to other institutions and give them the support that they need to succeed, as well.

MR. BEAULIEU: I recognize that this Teacher Education Program could be a little bit of a departure from the standard teacher education programs that may be offered in the South because many of the students are from the North. They're individuals who can be housed at Fort Smith. They have opportunities there that they may not see in the South. I recognize that there is a good SFA program. I'm wondering if the Minister could tell us how we would be able to get teachers to teach in the schools in a small community, which has proven to be very valuable, if this program gets cut?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As I mentioned, we do have one of the best Student Financial Assistance programs in the country, and we do support our students. We've made improvements to that program. The students who are impacted with the reductions that were brought forth through the Aurora College system, those things are still going to get the support that they need moving forward. Any transitions that are going down south to another institution, they'll continue to work with

University of Saskatchewan to make sure that the students get that education and can be teaching here in the North.

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

QUESTION 522-18(2):
STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR AURORA
COLLEGE

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education has made several statements about a need to ensure value for money at Aurora College, and I need to ensure we have adequate programming to support our fiscal bottom line and the contribution agreements - the government's and Aurora College's fiscal bottom line. I wonder if that's not part of our strategy moving forward. I've asked questions in this House, to the Minister, about an apprenticeship strategy, and I was told money will not be allocated to that until the plan has been put into effect. Do we have a working draft of that plan from our side in how we're allocating money to Aurora College, or is it, as he says, he has no idea what the college is doing, they're completely on their own recognizance, and there's minimal contact between staff at ECE and Aurora College in working on this long-term strategic goal for the college? Thank you.

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

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We currently have a contract with a third party consultant that's going out talking to key stakeholders on what they want to see presented to Aurora College programming and the strategic plan that they're developing. We have a third party consultant that's doing all that work. Once that report is done, it will be presented to Aurora College, the board of governors, as well as our department. Once we get that strategy, that report, we will share it with Regular Members to get their input, as well. I do know that Members have been asked to do a questionnaire and a survey with the third party consultants, so we're already hearing some of these inputs from the Regular Member as well as key stakeholders. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: The plot thickens, it seems, with this third party consultant. When was that contract signed with the consultant, and how long has this work been going on for?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: I don't have the exact dates, but I could get it to the Member if he wishes. Probably in the fall time was when we made that announcement, and they went out and started doing their consulting.

MR. TESTART: The honourable Member does so wish it, and I believe honourable Members of the Standing Committee of Social Development would like to see that as well, if the Minister could make that commitment to provide details of this consultant's work with both myself and Members of the Standing Committee on Social Development.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Yes, and I can also pull up some documentation in which I believe we did send all Members of this Legislative Assembly an e-mail talking about the strategy and giving input into the strategy, as well as going on the Aurora College website to give input into that as well.

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

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am aware of the strategic plan, just not this consultant's report. I think that's a very important piece of this puzzle. Finally, Mr. Speaker, given that there is a need to reassess how we are providing funding to post-secondary education, will the Minister commit to looking into enriching the partnership with Dechinta and College nordique, who are private sector, private post-secondary education institutions who have shown exponential growth and an ability to leverage their own funding? Will the Minister commit to making that possible coming out of this review, the strategic review? Thank you.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Yes, we do have a good partnership with College nordique as well as Dechinta. We have made some improvements. We have increased funding for Dechinta. We also went to multi-year contribution agreements, where before it was a year-to-year basis. They know and are given the knowledge that they are going to have funding for the next three years, and then we will continue to have those discussions with them, with any kind of improvements, programs, curriculum that we have, and we will continue to have those partnerships with College nordique as well as Dechinta. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The time for oral questions has expired. 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 standings and special committees. Item 14, reports of committees on the review of bills. Member for Nahendeh.

Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills

BILL 13: MARRIAGE ACT

MR. THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to report to this Assembly that the Standing Committee on Social Development has concluded its review of Bill 13, Marriage Act, and wishes to report that Bill 13 is now ready for consideration in Committee of the Whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 15, tabling of documents. Minister of Finance.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 262-18(2): PUBLIC ACCOUNTS, 2015-2016, SECTIONS 1, 2, 3 AND 4

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the following document entitled "Public Accounts, 2015-2016, Sections 1, 2, 3 and 4." 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. Minister of Finance.

Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills

BILL 15: AN ACT TO AMEND THE TOBACCO TAX ACT

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Wednesday, February 8, 2017, I will move that Bill 15, An Act to Amend the Tobacco Tax Act, be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Item 17, notices of motion for first reading of bills. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

BILL 16: AN ACT TO AMEND THE EDUCATION ACT

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Wednesday, February 8, 2017, I will move that Bill 16, An Act to Amend the Education Act, be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. 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 the Member for Sahtu in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. McNeely): I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of committee? Mr. Beaulieu.

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

---Carried

MR. BEAULIEU: I now rise to report progress. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: May I have the report, Member for Sahtu?

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. BEAULIEU: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 261-18(2), Northwest Territories Main Estimates 2017-2018 and we 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 Tuesday, February 7, 2017, 1:30 p.m.:

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
5. Returns to Oral Questions
6. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
7. Acknowledgements
8. Oral Questions
9. Written Questions

10. Returns to Written Questions
11. Replies to Commissioner's Opening Address
12. Replies to Budget Address (Day 5 of 7)
13. Petitions
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), NWT 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 Tuesday, February 7, 2017, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

