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The Honourable Frederick Blake Jr, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Thursday, February 4, 2021****Members Present**

Hon. Diane Archie, Hon. Frederick Blake Jr., Mr. Bonnetrouge, Hon. Paulie Chinna, Ms. Cleveland, Hon. Caroline Cochrane, Hon. Julie Green, Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Lafferty, Ms. Martselos, Ms. Nokleby, Mr. Norn, Mr. O'Reilly, Ms. Semmler, Hon. R.J. Simpson, Hon. Shane Thompson, Hon. Caroline Wawzonek

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Frederick Blake Jr.): Item 2, budget address. Minister of Finance.

Budget Address

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, approximately one year ago, I stood in this Assembly and introduced Budget 2020 as part of a journey. I described it as a foundation from which we could build a positive fiscal path forward towards long-term economic growth and stability. There were already negative economic indicators, but I said that we should not describe our circumstances as a crisis. I said that I was cautiously optimistic that achieving our priorities and building from a solid foundation was possible with discipline and planning.

At the time of tabling Budget 2020, I did not predict that last year's budget session would end abruptly to focus government efforts on a pandemic that was creating a public health crisis, not only in the Northwest Territories, but across Canada and around the world. The need to shut down to contain the virus resulted in an economic crisis for the Northwest Territories, a crisis that has impacted people in different ways, as many have lost their livelihoods or face precarious financial futures.

[English translation not available]

In tackling the pre-existing challenges of our undiversified economy, made only more immediate by the impacts of the pandemic, we should remember that the economy is not a thing. An economy is the way that we, as a society, choose to allocate our resources to serve our families, our communities, and our society's needs and wants, education and opportunities for our children and grandchildren, appropriate healthcare, housing, and food.

Challenges in crisis provide opportunity and motivation for needed change and for unified effort towards common goals. Knowing all of this, I

remain cautiously optimistic about our future. I do not arrive at this optimism lightly, and I will share three reasons with you.

First, the people of the Northwest Territories have confirmed that our brand of northern spirit, resilience, and community is stronger than ever. We all saw the power of coming together to follow health protocols, support our local economy, take staycations, and find creative ways to continue to deliver goods and services.

Second, our fiscal structure has insulated us from even greater economic shocks and allows us an opportunity to preserve stability as we look towards recovery. While in other times, many, including me, have expressed concern over the challenge of an undiversified economy, in the present economic climate, having a large public sector has helped support continued levels of employment and disposable income. Territorial formula financing, among other federal supports, has kept our revenues comparably stable.

Last, and where I will spend the majority of this budget address, is on the foundations that we have started to build for a healthy, resilient, and more diverse economic future for the Northwest Territories.

With the anxieties of the pandemic ever-present, I did not realize just how far we had actually come in the journey I spoke about one year ago until I began to prepare for this budget address. As I will soon describe, we are building foundations for a well-educated population; healthy and safe families and communities; and economic opportunities, both territory-building in scale and at community levels. We are changing the way we do business to give better value for the people of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, while delivering the budget this year, it is important to directly acknowledge the need for economic recovery. That fact does not diminish the reasons for optimism I shared earlier. Just in time to be reflected in Budget 2021, we have the benefit of the Business Advisory Council's report speaking to both relief and recovery from COVID-19. The report highlights the need to focus on education, green technology, and our opportunity to, not only move towards green energy solutions, but to be part of a

critical mineral value chain that will supply the world with the technological requirements for greener energy, as well as business support through government procurement, catching up on our infrastructure across sectors, and more and better opportunities for equity participation by Indigenous governments. I feel optimistic knowing that we all share similar goals and, again, the foundation to achieve those important asks are reflected in this budget.

The strength, resiliency, and creativity of the Northwest Territories population cannot be overstated as an economic benefit. I heard directly from many residents and organizations during budget dialogues last summer that, although there is anxiety and worry, people continue to believe we can achieve stability and growth. There was a desire for fiscal stability, which this budget provides by avoiding cuts or new taxes. There was also a strong connection drawn between long-term investments in people, including education and health, and future financial well-being, which is also reflected in this budget.

Another strong theme was the need to know that the government will be efficient and fiscally responsible with an eye on the future. This last ask is the goal of the Government Renewal Initiative that I announced in October and which is now under way. This does not require new funding from this budget, but it will be a significant government-wide effort to ensure that our fiscal house is in order.

Mr. Speaker, I present Budget 2021 as a stability budget that builds on the foundations we have set over the past year and allows further opportunity to advance many important projects. In this time of uncertainty, we propose to carry on with \$2 billion in expenditures and no spending reductions. Over the next few minutes, I will share details of the work happening across departments that will support our economic future; describe ongoing investments in our people, our anchor industries, and our communities; and what is being done to ensure government efficiency so that I can continue to stand in the Assembly and say that we should look with optimism towards our future.

Mr. Speaker, we estimate that the Northwest Territories economy shrank almost 7 percent in 2020 because of the immediate and severe economic disruption caused by the global coronavirus pandemic at the beginning of the year. By the end of 2020, we saw the predicted economic rebound begin, and we expect economic activity this year to continue to recover from the 2020 low. The Northwest Territories economy in 2021 will likely remain smaller than it was in 2019, and the risks and challenges remain the same as before the pandemic's economic shock. Until the global health

crisis is under control, a full recovery of the territorial economy will be slow and uneven.

Industries such as local retail, construction, and public administration have seen faster returns towards pre-pandemic strength, while hard-hit sectors such as tourism, hospitality, airlines, mining, and wholesale trade continue to struggle. Global lock-downs and border closures, reluctance or lack of opportunity to travel by air, and reduced international demand for diamonds, fur, and aurora tours means our hardest-hit sectors will take more time to show signs of recovery. Long-term challenges such as maturing diamond mines, an aging population, and a lack of economic diversification or private sector activity will depress future growth unless there are substantial structural changes. Long-term structural challenges must not be underestimated. Meanwhile, we must remain vigilant about public health orders because more coronavirus cases in the territory could dampen economic recovery.

Putting forward a recovery plan while still in the midst of an evolving crisis is challenging. We need to invest when the moment is right to catch the wave of recovery while not underestimating the full extent of the pandemic and investing too soon. With a spirit of knowing what we can accomplish together, especially when collectively motivated, we are working to develop our recovery roadmap. It will evolve as the distribution of the vaccines changes the way we respond to the pandemic. We should all feel encouraged that with the vaccine, the can-do attitude shown by the public service from the earliest days of the pandemic through to the vaccine roll-out, the creativity and patience of the business community, and the investments proposed in Budget 2021, we can move quickly with a flexible and responsive recovery.

The GNWT is a large player in the territory's economy. Budget 2021 has no reductions because right now the economy needs support. Despite welcomed additional federal transfers since last March to help us keep our residents safe and our economy working, we expect to spend more on programs and services in 2020-2021 than what we will bring in as revenues. For the third year in a row, we anticipate that we will have an operating deficit. This means that we needed to borrow more than expected for the capital budget, and debt is projected to increase to \$1.33 billion by March 31, 2021. In Budget 2021, thanks again to increased federal support, we are projecting revenues to be higher than operating expenditures, which will produce a \$69-million operating surplus. However, we need more than this operating surplus to pay for the \$441-million capital plan approved last October and to start reducing the debt that we have already accumulated.

Revenues are projected to be \$2.2 billion in 2021-2022. We are expecting lower amounts of our own revenues, especially corporate income tax, resource royalties, and revenues from the airport, Yellowknife airport, and Marine Transportation System revolving funds. The federal government is providing additional funds above the typical annual transfers, and our fiscal independence has weakened as a result. The combination of increased transfers and lower own-source revenue has increased the federal contribution to our total revenues from an average 81 percent to over 85 percent. While territorial formula financing arrangements provide a stable and predictable revenue base, we are facing serious risks to our own-source revenues. A slowing economy will likely mean several years of declining tax revenue, especially corporate and personal income taxes, and potentially little resource revenues. Furthermore, we face significant risks to both our own revenue base and federal transfers if our population starts to decline.

Mr. Speaker, we have chosen to balance our need for revenue by supporting a competitive tax regime for small businesses, reducing the small-business tax rate from 4 percent to 2 percent effective January 1, 2021. In an average year, this will result in forgone revenues of about \$1.7 million annually but provides greater value by leaving small businesses with more resources to grow the economy. Continuing our usual practice, we will increase property tax rates and some fees to match inflation. As we agreed by signing the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change, our carbon tax rates will increase to \$40 per tonne of carbon-dioxide-equivalent emissions on July 1, 2021. Although this will add 2.4 cents in additional tax to a litre of gasoline and corresponding increases to other carbon-based fuels, our suite of carbon tax rebates will continue, and the cost-of-living offset will increase on July 1st to \$208 per adult and \$240 per child to help residents to adjust to the higher carbon price.

Mr. Speaker, we are proposing to spend \$2 billion on programs and services in 2021-2022, an increase of \$117 million from last year's budget, a result of \$132 million in new spending that is partially offset by \$15 million in savings. Not all of this funding will be rolled into the operating budget expenditure base for future years, such as the \$41 million for various COVID-19 supports included in the budget to continue to keep our communities and residents safe. We are hopeful that our evolving response to the public health risks will make a portion of the \$35 million for the COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat included in this budget unnecessary, with the need for the secretariat phased out over the 2021-2022 fiscal year. The budget includes \$4.3 million for contributions for our

schools, to ensure that learning continues while we keep our children safe, and an additional \$1.1 million to student financial assistance for extra support to post-secondary students for their increased education costs because of the pandemic.

Excluding the COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat and other COVID-related supports, Budget 2020 includes \$2.3 million more for new-asset amortization costs and \$90 million in new spending. This new spending includes \$23 million to maintain existing service levels in some programs, \$40 million to enhance programs and services already offered, and \$26 million to further our priorities. Over 60 percent of our spending on programs and services goes to investments in our people and to keep our communities healthy and safe. Spending on social programs and communities underpins a healthy economy. We propose in this budget to increase spending on these vital programs by \$64 million, including \$20 million for initiatives that directly address priorities of this Assembly, \$28 million to continue or enhance work already underway, and \$16 million to address funding pressures such as income incidence, medical travel expenses, and shelter funding.

Budget 2021 includes \$4.5 million to complete the phased approach to bring child- and youth-care counsellors to all regions of the territory to support young people facing a range of personal or social issues. This program will provide year-round support and ensure that help is available after hours. We need to better protect vulnerable children, and we are proposing to add \$7 million to the Child and Family Services budget for this purpose. These new resources will expand the ability of Child and Family Services to address gaps in the system and to accelerate implementation of its quality improvement plan. The additional resources will compress what was a five-year plan into three years, with the second phase expected to be completed shortly and the third phase in 2021-2022. The funding will increase the number of community social service workers, family preservation workers, child and youth placement coordinators, foster care and adoption workers, and case aid workers to help vulnerable children and their families. The Office of the Children's Lawyer is experiencing an increased number of clients, and we have included an additional \$99,000 in funding to support service availability.

Mr. Speaker, we want our families to be healthy. We propose to renew and improve the Healthy Family Program with \$1.1 million to help parents ensure their children get a good start in life. The Healthy Family Program was redesigned with support from families, communities, and other partners to better reflect early childhood

development and culturally based prevention priorities.

A good start in life needs to include opportunities for early learning and quality childcare. One significant reason for the lack of licenced childcare spaces is the high costs of infrastructure to start up or expand operations. By providing ongoing funding of \$500,000 in this budget to subsidize facility repairs and renovations, we will help increase the number of daycare spaces and improve childcare availability and affordability.

Before remote learning became a common concept across Canada last March, the GNWT had already introduced the Northern Distance Learning Program so that youths in remote communities could remain with their families and still have access to educational opportunities available in larger centres. We are adding an additional \$1.2 million for the Northern Distance Learning Program in this budget to fulfil the next step in the multi-year plan to improve and enhance services and make the program available to more students.

If we want better education outcomes for our children, we need to ensure that our schools use the best practices and that these practices have the support of parents and students, education staff, and Indigenous governments. This budget includes \$306,000 for the first year of a three-year plan to modernize and renew the Education Act, to support an education system that will set out students up for success. We are also proposing to include \$265,000 in this budget to advance the development and implementation of competency-based professional standards for junior kindergarten to grade 12 educators.

Connecting students to jobs is good for the student, good for business, and good for the economy. With an additional \$508,000, we propose to hire career and education advisors in the Deh Cho, the Sahtu, and the South Slave regions similar to the advisors already in the North Slave region. These advisors will work with the students and their parents and guardians to provide information for the transition to post-secondary schooling, provide advice to Aurora College students on northern job opportunities, promote the Schools North Apprenticeship Program for skilled trades and certifications, and help post-secondary territorial students connect with employers.

As the territory's population ages, the GNWT plans to significantly increase long-term care spaces where they are needed most. We have added \$406,000 in this budget to address increased costs for long-term care services currently provided by AVENS. Budget 2021 includes \$1.1 million to train more personal support workers and licenced practical nurses through Aurora College, to care for

long-term care residents with graduates who have gained their skills within our territorial community.

Community governments deliver services that are vital for the survival of our communities and our economy. To help reduce the gap between the cost of providing municipal services and the revenues that communities can raise themselves, we propose to increase annual community government funding by \$3.3 million. Communities can count on their share of this revenue to continue year over year to more adequately fund their operations and water and sewer system services. However, we estimate that there is still a \$16.4-million funding gap for these community budgets. We will continue to work with our community government partners to address this gap.

We are exploring better ways to keep our communities safe. This budget includes a \$303,000 proposal for a pilot community safety officer program that will be community-led and developed using best practices from other jurisdictions to guide implementation. Administered by a community government, community safety officers will be a visible presence in the community to deter crime and will develop close working relationships with the RCMP and municipal and territorial enforcement agencies. These officers will not carry weapons and will actively work with citizens in a culturally appropriate way to promote community well-being.

Budget 2021 includes a number of other investments in justice programs. We are proposing to continue work already started with the Government of Canada with an additional \$158,000 in 2020-2021/2021-2022 for finalizing and implementing the Gun and Gang Strategy. This work supports community-level prevention and enforcement efforts to address criminal activity arising from organized crime and to appropriately design a response to the violence, fear, and harm created by gangs.

In response to increased demand for court sittings, we propose to include \$233,000 to create two new sheriff's staff positions in Yellowknife. We have also included \$123,000 in this budget to address rising costs for providing services for inmates at the North Slave Correctional Complex.

The demands of around-the-clock law enforcement in our largest city, combined with new training requirements, means it is necessary to include \$422,000 in this budget for three more RCMP constables in Yellowknife.

Finally, we accept the recommendations in the 2021 Judicial Remuneration Commission Report by including \$257,000 in this budget for additional

compensation and training opportunities for territorial court judges.

The 19th Legislative Assembly has a clear priority to increase the number of affordable homes and reduce core housing need. The 2021-2022 budget proposes to provide the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation with the first \$5 million out of a total of \$15 million over three years so that it can participate in the National Housing Co-Investment Fund and expand the number of housing projects it can undertake. We also propose to provide the corporation with \$300,000 to help low-income homeowners replace aging fuel tanks and an additional \$109,000 to assist emergency shelters facing increased costs due to inflation.

We are proposing to add \$4 million to the Income Assistance Program to address both an increase in clients and changes in allowances.

Escalating drug and non-discretionary supply costs as well as more patients requiring out-of-territory care have put huge expenditure pressures on our health system. We are addressing these pressures with a further \$30 million for increased healthcare expenditures in this budget, including \$8.4 million in federal funding to improve services under the First Nation Home and Community Care Agreement. This additional funding addresses some of the annual overage in the Department of Health and Social Services budget, such as \$7.5 million to reflect the 24-hour, seven-days-a-week nature of operations; \$3.4 million for medical travel; \$1.8 million for supplementary health benefits; and \$4.2 million for out-of-territory hospital and physician services for residents. We recognize that the need for \$30 million in one year to address the fiscal challenges in our healthcare system is significant. The Department of Health and Social Services has developed a sustainability plan to ensure the long-term fiscal viability of our health services in the face of mounting costs, so that residents can continue to receive the best possible physical and mental healthcare.

We are proposing \$280,000 in this budget to extend the community-based peer support program started this year for people with mental health and addictions issues. Increasing evidence is showing that supportive relationships between people with common experiences help reduce hospitalization and distress and improve the quality of life of participants.

As part of our ongoing partnership with Canada on home and community care, we are proposing a \$290,000 increase in the budget to further support the Paid Family/Caregiver Project and fund project software to improve service delivery.

We are looking in this budget to maintain the momentum to preserve, revitalize, and strengthen Indigenous languages, with \$600,000 in continued spending to develop and Indigenous languages education immersion diploma, in partnership with Aurora College, the University of Victoria, and Indigenous governments.

[English translation not available]

Mr. Speaker, the coronavirus pandemic has hurt some businesses more than others. [English translation not available]... economic strategies has not done enough to provide economic diversity, stability, and strength. A successful future economy needs investments in lifelong education. That is one of the main reasons we have done the legislative groundwork to transform Aurora College into a polytechnic university.

We also need to ensure that we have processes in place to monitor and evaluate our post-secondary programs so its students can be assured that our educational programs meet the required standards and quality found at other Canadian universities. To achieve this, we are proposing to add \$177,000 for a quality assurance coordinator to maintain quality instruction at the post-secondary level.

Over the past year, the tourism sector and many of the hospitality and accommodation businesses associated with it have been especially hard hit by the impacts of the pandemic that crippled travel and tourism worldwide. The Northwest Territories remains a spectacular destination for Canadians and international travellers alike, and we want to remind the world of what we offer as a destination. The proposed \$936,000 in this budget for a renewed tourism 2025 investment strategy is intended to help our tourism sector to return to 2018-2019 levels of visitors and spending by 2024-2025 by preserving funding of existing programs and introducing new services and activities providing for training for operators and tourism staff, and gathering data to better reflect and guide the evaluation of the investments.

The challenges in our resource sector are rooted in the global market but we can still find effective ways to support this vital part of our economy. We need to provide clarity, certainty, and an inclusive approach to balancing priorities of exploration, development, community involvement and environmental stewardship. We have the opportunity to position the Northwest Territories as a leader in responsible resource exploration and development by drafting sensible regulations that do not discourage resource development while still providing the environmental protection that Northwest Territories residents expect.

This budget includes an additional \$360,000 in 2021-2022 only to develop the regulations for the Mineral Resources Act, which came into effect near the end of the 18th Legislative Assembly. We also propose to maintain the Mineral Incentive Program by reinstating \$400,000 for 2021-2022 and propose \$225,000 for the continued implementation of the petroleum resources strategy.

We are continuing to implement our Commercial Fisheries Revitalization Strategy for a viable Great Slave Lake commercial fishery. To support commercial fishers on Great Slave Lake, we propose to include \$150,000 to expand the role of the fish officer position while the fish processing plant is being built in Hay River. We also propose a \$100,000 contribution to assist the Tlicho fishers' cooperative to complete the work necessary to put the plant into operation. On the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight, the budget includes \$510,000 to further adjust the mandate priority to increase the amount of food produced locally. We propose to direct \$110,000 of this funding to the sustainable livelihoods program to work with partners to develop and deliver harvesting training courses, including safety and navigation, harvesting and processing skills, and food preparation.

We also propose to allocate \$400,000 of this funding to implement a food safety framework and develop appropriate food safety regulations that will help remove obstacles that prevent residents producing their own food and distributing to others.

We intend to sharpen the focus of our efforts to address unauthorized land occupancy by proposing \$309,000 to address untenured and unauthorized occupants on public lands. We will use these funds, along with participation from Indigenous groups and Northwest Territories residents, to identify ownership, determine if occupancy is based on traditional rights, offer tenure to land if appropriate, or move ahead and remove unauthorized occupants. We also intend to support better land use planning with \$253,000 to staff in the Wek'eezhi land-use planning office.

We aim to link our support for regional economic development with opportunities in the knowledge economy by proposing to include \$350,000 to capitalize in our knowledge economy strengths, and establish regional economic development plans with our partners.

The Northwest Territories is at the forefront of the effects of climate change and sees its impact on our environment, wildlife, and people. In October 2020, the GNWT allocated \$2.6 million to support five departments in staffing 14 new full-time and two new seasonal climate change-related positions located in Yellowknife, Hay River, Fort Smith, and

Inuvik for implementation of the 2030 Northwest Territories Climate Change Strategic Framework action plan.

Budget 2021, plans to continue this work with an additional \$2.6 million. This funding will be used to help the Northwest Territories transition to an economy that uses fossil fuels less intensively and is better able to adapt to the effects of climate change on the natural environment, human health and well-being, culture and heritage, infrastructure, and the economy.

The GNWT is also establishing a Northwest Territories climate change council to include Indigenous governments and organizations, community governments and other external partners, including non-government organizations and industry representatives in the implementation of our action plan. The council will play a key role in strengthening the leadership and authority of the GNWT on climate change.

We are pleased to honour the Deline Got'ine Government financing agreement with \$199,000 for incremental grant funding, equivalent to funding received by other communities.

As announced last July, we propose to invest \$631,000 in this budget to create a gender equity unit, to lead and coordinate all of the work being done to advance equality in the Northwest Territories. With these resources, we want to better ensure that government decisions, including financial decisions, consider there is sometimes unequal effect on people with different identity factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, or abilities. We want to support all the partners and agencies to consider gender and identity factors so that they can improve all services delivered and advance the goal of a more inclusive society. This work is just beginning for us, but its purpose has been enshrined in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms and called for in the calls to justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. With an expanded unit, the GNWT can better serve the public by incorporating the perspectives of people from across the gender spectrum in its activities and assessing how diverse groups of Northwest Territories residents experience government policies.

We have added new spending to this year's operating and capital budgets without finding any savings or new revenues to pay for them in order to be a source of stability while we navigate globally uncertain times. As we advance in this Assembly, we will need to set ourselves on a better expenditure track if we want to be able to continue to make investments that will provide for a

strengthened and diversified economy for the future.

Mr. Speaker, not every initiative requires significant new funding. Some of the most important work we are doing towards improving our economic outlook and fiscal governments does not have its own budget line. For example, we have established a working group to find ways to reduce red tape for small business. The working group will look at regulations and processes used to enforce regulations that affects small businesses and will ask why we have certain regulations and assess the risk if the regulation is removed or the process changed. We expect the working group to provide recommendations to improve regulations so they achieve their reason for existence with the least administrative burden possible.

We have also recently announced the formal start of the procurement review. In addition, on October 30, 2020, I announced the next steps in the promise made in our first budget to use creativity and innovation to do better with the resources we have and move away from any pattern of spending that allows duplication.

Starting immediately, the Department of Finance will be working with other departments to implement the Government Renewal Initiative. Government renewal must take a comprehensive and whole-of-government review. The renewal starts with individual departments but will quickly extend to reviewing programs and outcomes that are shared across departments. We will be using program evaluation techniques, gathering objective evidence, and reporting on outcomes associated with the spending of public money to help inform financially responsible and sustainable policy choices.

The vision is to help departments build their budgets based on the value delivered in the service of public priorities, rather than on incremental growth. This is a shift in the way that we think about budgeting and the need for close coordination and clear communication between government and Members of the Legislative Assembly as the work progresses will be essential. We all have a role to play in ensuring that the GNWT is an effective and sustainable organization for the long term and that all of our decisions are driven by value and priorities that serve residents across the territory. Once a stronger culture of outcome evaluation and the processes of value-oriented budgeting are in place, the ongoing benefit for delivering on priorities will make the time and resources spent worthwhile.

Mr. Speaker, the health, social, and economic crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the power of pulling together as a society and as a government in pursuit of a common goal. As we

have done across the Northwest Territories in order to limit and contain the spread of COVID-19, we need to take advantage of this collective spirit to keep the momentum going towards the common goal of supporting the recovery and future economic growth.

Budget 2021-2022 is not itself a COVID-19 relief package. Our recovery cannot be a one-time event. It will need to reflect the changing landscape of this pandemic, including the vaccine rollout here and across Canada, and the speed of the global economic recovery. Budget 2021 provides stability and builds on the foundations of economic growth that we already knew we needed last year. I remain cautiously optimistic about our economic and fiscal future, a future for all Northwest Territories residents.

Through engagements with the business community, I know the frustrations and fears are very real, but what they have said about our economy and ideas for change is not a surprise. That leaves me optimistic, because I see the work that we are doing to address those calls for change. Similarly, after conducting extensive budget dialogues last summer, we heard the calls from residents to ensure investments in people, to avoid government duplication, find internal efficiencies, and ensure value for public dollars. This also gives me the confidence that our initiatives are on a good path.

Budget 2021 continues to invest in healthcare, communities, and community services, early childhood supports, education modernization, including in distance education, and progress on the climate action plan. There are also investments towards a modern regulatory landscape for our mineral resources sector and public lands. Furthermore, we are advancing regional growth initiatives, such as the Great Slave Lake fishery and exploring LNG feasibility.

The three mandated infrastructure projects, the Mackenzie Valley Highway, the Taltson Hydro Expansion, and the Slave Geological Corridor, continue to progress. In addition, there is an expansion of the Mackenzie Valley fibre optic line to Tuktoyaktuk, and the Government of the Northwest Territories is supporting the Tlicho government to run a fibre optic line to Whati in conjunction with the final work on the Tlicho All-Season Road. These projects, together with work announced by Northwestel last fall, mean that all Northwest Territories communities will have access to high-speed Internet by 2023.

Mr. Speaker, the pandemic is still with us just as much as the economic problems that pre-existed it. Our work to respond to all of these challenges is under way. Added to that is the resiliency of the

people of the Northwest Territories. That resiliency is also not new, but it has been particularly strong and present through the pandemic: a resiliency that includes creativity, innovation, and collaboration. With these foundations, we will build a healthier and more sustainable economic future for the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Colleagues, we will continue after a short recess. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

MR. SPEAKER: Welcome back, everyone. Item 3, Ministers' statements. Minister of Justice.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 101-19(2): CORRECTIONS SERVICE MOVES FORWARD ON WORKPLACE IMPROVEMENT

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, corrections can be a difficult and challenging field. In addition to the demanding environment and 24/7 operations, the Corrections Service must always adapt to the ever-evolving best practices. Five years ago, the Auditor General gave us a path forward to address conditions that focused on our case management and programs for offenders, and as a result, significant changes have been made. This summer, a new Corrections Act will come into force signaling a shift towards a greater focus on rehabilitation and reintegration, and enhancing transparency and accountability of corrections services. We are moving in the right direction and have made progress, but clearly, more work needs to be done.

Over the last number of years, the Department of Justice has heard various concerns raised by Corrections Service staff regarding their workplaces. To fully understand and address these concerns, the Deputy Minister of the Department of Justice initiated a workplace assessment to hear directly from staff across various levels and locations of the Corrections Services. This work was conducted by an independent contractor to encourage honest, confidential discussions. The goal was to hear from as many employees as possible. I want to thank and commend the staff who took the time to share their workplace experiences, both good and bad, with the consultants. It shows they care, are passionate, and want to be involved in making improvements and constructive change.

The final assessment report identified specific areas where we are doing well and areas where we need to do better, including staffing; policies and directives; safety, leadership and support; and communication. The report also highlighted the

need for management to do a better job engaging with staff prior to implementing changes.

The Department of Justice provided the report to staff to allow them time to consider solutions for moving forward. Senior leadership held numerous meetings with staff in December to discuss initiatives currently under way that will help address some of the concerns, and to open the lines of communication and listen to additional solutions to address the areas where improvement is needed.

Mr. Speaker, some of the actions that we are currently undertaking include revising and updating the Corrections Northern Recruitment Training Program; implementing new processes to ensure staff receive re-certification training in a timely manner; a full replacement of uniforms to ensure they are complete and fit appropriately; and continued participation in appropriate leadership training for supervisors and managers within the Corrections Service so they are better equipped to support and lead their staff. Meetings between management and staff will continue so that site-specific operational challenges and issues can be addressed collaboratively.

I want to assure Members that the workplace assessment report will not be shelved and forgotten about. The report laid bare issues across the Corrections Service, and we must confront those issues head-on. The Department of Justice will be held accountable for the response to the concerns raised by staff, and Mr. Speaker, they want to be held accountable to ensure that these issues are addressed to the best of their abilities. However, there is recognition that the Department of Justice cannot make all of the necessary improvements on its own. There is a need for a more collaborative working relationship between the Department of Justice and the Department of Finance, in their role as Human Resources, as well as with the Union of Northern Workers, or UNW. Acknowledging this, a working group has been established, chaired by the Assistant Deputy Minister, Solicitor General, and will include senior officials from both departments, as well as the UNW. The working group will report progress to the Deputy Minister of Finance, the Deputy Minister of Justice and the President of the UNW. This group will listen to and learn from our dedicated corrections professionals as the team works collectively to improve Corrections Services workplaces.

This working group will oversee the development and implementation of a Corrections Service Workplace Assessment Accountability Framework, a monitoring and evaluation process and a staff communication plan. As outlined in the Department of Justice's Business Plan, the Accountability Framework for Corrections, previously called the Human Resources Plan, will be established before

the end of this sitting, and all of the initiatives in the plan will be implemented by 2024.

I commit to providing updates on the progress the Department of Justice is making toward improving Corrections Services. We must remember that our goal is always to ensure the safety of corrections staff and individuals within the corrections system. To feel safe, our staff must feel supported in their daily work so they, in turn, can successfully support probation clients and inmates as they work to make the necessary changes to reintegrate back into our communities. Our employees are hard-working, professional, and dedicated, and with their help, and the help of the working group, we will make positive changes to the corrections work environment and, as a result, to the safety of the people in our care. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Ministers' statements. Minister of Infrastructure.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 102-19(2):
UPDATE ON THE 2030 ENERGY STRATEGY

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to strengthening our leadership and authority on climate change, as well as enhancing efforts to stabilize the cost of power and increase the use of alternative and renewable energy. As part of these commitments, our government has made almost \$26 million in energy-related investments this past year, which are highlighted in the 2019-2020 Energy Initiatives Report, which was released in January.

Designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, provide reliable energy to our communities and stabilize energy costs for residents, the projects highlighted in the initiatives report support the goals set in the Northwest Territories' 2030 Energy Strategy.

Some of these projects include the ongoing work being done by our partner, the Arctic Energy Alliance, or AEA. With federal funding from the Low Carbon Economy Leadership Fund, the AEA launched a series of new and enhanced programs. Some of these help lower-income homeowners winterize their homes, and others provide rebates on new electric vehicles and energy efficient products. In fact, this past year, AEA doubled the amount of rebates provided to households.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT also continues to roll out the Greenhouse Gas Grant Program. This year, \$274,000 was awarded to a northern-owned plumbing and heating company in Yellowknife. The company will install a wood pellet boiler district heating system that will supply heat to its headquarters and the GNWT central warehouse.

This system also has the potential to connect to other private commercial buildings in the area. Once complete, this project is expected to displace over 190 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions and save 60,000 litres of oil annually.

Mr. Speaker, progress was also made this year with the proposed Taltson Hydro Expansion project. This project has the potential to displace greenhouse gas emissions, while supporting efforts to stabilize the cost of energy, and create significant opportunities for Indigenous participation and benefits and employment opportunities for all Northerners.

As part of the GNWT's assessment for the Taltson expansion, the GNWT has signed an agreement with the Arctic Research Foundation to map two potential submarine transmission line routes on the lakebed of Great Slave Lake. As identified in the Energy Initiatives Report, the expedition included the participation of students from Lutselk'e and the Yellowknife area, who received hands-on training from scientists and local crew in advanced mapping technology and marine vessel operation. Hopefully, these students will use this experience to inspire new and creative solutions for the future.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT is setting the stage for other ambitious energy projects. One example is the Inuvik Wind Project, another key initiative under the 2030 Energy Strategy. The project will see a 3.5-megawatt wind turbine installed, reducing diesel consumption in our largest off-grid community by up to 30 percent. Late last year, we secured a land-use permit and water licence from the Gwich'in Land and Water Board. The GNWT looks forward to advancing this project to the construction phase, realizing its environmental, economic, and regional benefits.

These are just some examples of the exciting energy projects happening across the territory today. The GNWT will continue to engage directly with communities and Indigenous governments and organizations to ensure their participation, partnership, and empowerment when proposing and implementing energy solutions. We all have a role to play in making sure that the Northwest Territories meets its climate change objectives. Through government support and individual action, we can make it happen. Quyanainni, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Ministers' statements. Deputy Premier.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 103-19(2):
PREMIER ABSENT FROM THE HOUSE

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise the House that the Honourable Caroline Cochrane will be absent from the House

for a portion of today's proceedings to participate in an urgent conference call with the Council of the Federation and First Ministers meeting. Quyanainni, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Deputy Premier. Ministers' statements. Item 4, Members' statements. Member for Nunakput.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ASSISTANCE REQUIRED IN COMMUNITIES DURING PANDEMIC

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last two-and-a-half months, I've been home, and this is basically what I've seen, the struggles that our communities are going through, my home community of Tuktoyaktuk, and I could only imagine the rest of the communities across the territory. This COVID-19, Mr. Speaker, it makes it tough on everybody, the way gatherings and stuff are happening right now, and I think that we really have to thank our front-line workers, our nurses, RCMP, the teachers, our hamlet staff, the community corporations, the bands, our IRC staff in Gwich'in, for all the hard work that they do.

Mr. Speaker, we have to start looking at and focusing on the little things instead, on healthy families, healthy living across our territory. We have our youths. We have to provide more programming. We don't have enough funding. The local community governments are stretched, and the IRC is assisting the community corporations to help provide services and different programming that we need so badly right now because of COVID-19. You can't basically do anything. You can't travel. Same thing with our adult care programming, you know, for treatment, any kind of treatment that people need. Our elders' care programming, more funds for the communities to do this, to work with MACA, and to get counsellors and grief counsellors and all kinds coming into the community for a week, instead of having to call them and work with them, sending in teams once a month to each community to help people get through this.

Our communities are hurting, Mr. Speaker. I see this more and more. We have a \$27-million revolving fund for alcohol and drugs. I see how alcohol and drugs affect my constituents because we have nothing going on. There's no work up there. What could we do to help them? We have to provide some sort of service for them. We have to provide service for them, getting treatment in the Northwest Territories, Mr. Speaker. They need help, and giving them options other than doing that. That means getting them work, getting small

projects in each community. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker; thank you, colleagues. We need projects to help our people, consistent help with cost of living, struggling paying bills, food, power. Mr. Speaker, what we can do is what we have to do: assist our local community governments, provide more funding of services. We have a role to play as a government, as all 19 Members, to try to help our people. Let's put our talk to the test. Our Budget 2021, let's put that to the test now. I want to see helping our communities on their daily struggles, supporting our local leaders and our mayors, Mr. Speaker. We have to do better as a government. We have to do better as all MLAs to help our people in the small communities, and not just in the capital. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Nunakput. Members' statements. Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON HEALTH CARE SERVICE

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the morning of January 18, 2021, I read a CBC article with a video of a man crawling out of a southern emergency department and a nurse walking beside him, and it stated that she was saying, "You're a big boy. You're strong. Come on, big boy. Stand up." Only to find out later that he had Guillain-Barre Syndrome, which was affecting him to walk. Mr. Pontone also a history of bipolar, so he felt that's why his concerns were dismissed.

It made me think of Hugh Pakik, an Aklavik elder who died of a stroke after being mistaken for being drunk. In the CBC article that I found, his niece said the staff in the elders' home and the Aklavik Health Centre wouldn't treat her uncle because they mistook him for being drunk. After an external investigation, it provided 16 recommendations. One of the recommendations was that the Northwest Territories implement mandatory culturally safe training for all healthcare workers.

Mr. Speaker, I sat and wondered how many with mental health issues or who are Indigenous and people of colour are treated in our health and social services system in the NWT. We all know it happens. Those of us who fall into these groups take it and very few complain. Little did I know that morning would put me in a situation that I was not planning. I have been to the emergency department here three times since being elected, twice to advocate for my children and once for myself. Two out of the three times, I did not expect the treatment

that we received. Yes, I said "advocate," because sometimes our youth and our elders and many others, especially those from small communities, feel that they are not heard or they don't say the right things, and sometimes the questions they are asked, they don't understand.

As a nurse and a past emergency department manager, all I can say is that the way we were treated was unacceptable, and I am unsure as to why we were treated that way. Was it discrimination? Was the staff having a bad day? I don't know, but what I do know is that it was something that we hear far too often. Do we have to feel guilty or that we're putting the staff out of their way because we are sick and asking for help? No. That's what they are paid for, but this is the power that they hold.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you would agree that anyone who walks into an emergency room or any health centre clinic should be treated the same, no matter their race, medical history, addictions. None of this should change the way they are treated, spoken to, triaged, or cared for. I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you. I am not painting everyone with the same brush. I know that not all staff are like this, but I am bringing this to this floor so that everyone out there can hear. People need to be responsible for their actions, and we need to hold them to account for that, even as co-workers. People, if you witness this happening in your workplace, this needs to be addressed. If it's happening to our residents, our residents need to feel safe to report it. The only way things will change is if we make the change. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Members' statements. Member for Thebacha.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ECONOMIC RECOVERY

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has now been 11 months since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. That is nearly one year we have been dealing with this global health crisis, a crisis which has disrupted nearly every aspect of daily life in one way or another. I know that, in any pandemic situation, the core mission of a government is to protect its citizens and to combat and eliminate the disease that is plaguing the planet, which in our case is COVID-19. However, secondary to that objective is to help the economy to stay afloat. To help the economy, we as a government must stimulate the

business community with much-needed aid and assistance.

Just yesterday, the Premier cited \$120 million worth of federal funding that the Government of the Northwest Territories has received to date to help with the effects of the pandemic. On the surface, that sounds like a lot, but when you break it down, it does not amount to a lot of financial aid spread out: \$86 million went to the COVID secretariat; \$28.8 million went to the airline industry, which is much needed; \$1.583 million went to MACA for sports; leaving \$4.3 million for incidentals, not necessarily going to small- and medium-sized businesses. All sectors of our economy have taken a huge hit as a result of this pandemic, and many businesses, particularly small- and medium-sized, are struggling to survive.

Right now, the NWT does not have a long-term economic stability mandate. According to the Conference Board of Canada, the economic sectors hurting the most right now in the Northwest Territories are mining, oil and gas, tourism, accommodations, and the food industry. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

MS. MARTSELOS: However, even beyond statistics, just by entering a business within any of these sectors you will notice an impact. You see the decline in customer base wherever you go. This is very concerning, especially for businesses who rely on regular face-to-face customers to make an income. Not all businesses have been able to adapt to the pandemic equally. There have been high levels of job and income losses for many people within the private sector. How much more of this can the business community take? There is only so much slack that can be given to a business community to maneuver through this pandemic.

The economic effects of this pandemic are far-reaching. It has changed our lives completely. As a government, we have a duty to help all sectors of our economy to be sustained and insulated as much as possible over the course of this pandemic and beyond. If we do not address the needs of the business community, we may not have an economy to return to once this pandemic is over. I will have questions for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Members' statements. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ON-THE-LAND PROGRAMMING

MR. NORN: Marsi cho, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to report back to the House about my recent constituency tour. I made it a clear point to visit all four communities in my riding just before Christmas, and I did just that within a two-week period. Aside from my home visits, some highlights were going out and supporting our arts and crafts programs in Ndilo, Dettah, and Deninu Kue, and I participated in an art program with my daughter Cicely in Ndilo that was facilitated through one of our local talents, Mr. John Rombough. Through all the hustle and bustle of this job, it was nice to sit, slow down, and create something that we could be proud of, and also making new connections with our constituents.

In saying that, Mr. Speaker, I learned a key lesson in my last visit that, yes, laughter is good medicine, but then I realized that land and culture is even more powerful medicine than that. Case in point: In my visit to Lutselk'e, there was a moment where I saw a powerful connection between our youth, elders, and the land. At one point during the visit, I witnessed an elder speaking Chipewyan to the youth learning how to set snares and traps. This program was facilitated through the LKDFN wellness program and the Thaidene Nene program, which is funded through ENR, and I wanted to thank the Minister and his team for that. In that moment, I saw a youth completely engaged, learning not only the old ways but learning language, practising skills, and using their hands to learn. I saw youth that were enjoying themselves, laughing, and staying away from the bad elements, and I was quite happy to see that in action.

Mr. Speaker, no one knows what is going on at a community level better than the community members themselves. I believe that this government needs to take a hard look and start implementing more of these programs to help those in need heal. I also believe this can be a powerful tool to start addressing some mental health issues, addictions, education, and justice issues.

I just spoke to a community member in Liidlii K'ue about a new program called "Journey to My Best Self." It is being facilitated by Shake the Dust Hope Consulting. It is a 30-day healing program that will focus on mental health and addictions. Long story short, they have an outpouring of requests from inside and outside the community to participate in this program, and they will definitely need help in terms of staff and funding to ensure success. Above all else, the influx of requests sends another message: Our people are screaming for help.

To finish up, Mr. Speaker, a small group of us visited an elder at their cabin while I was at Lutselk'e and sat down with some fresh bannock and tea. I listened in with a couple of youth and took in some good old-fashioned storytelling. There

were no phones or electronics, just a face-to-face sit-down and lots of laughter. How can you beat that?

Marsi cho, Mr. Speaker. I will have questions for the appropriate Ministers at a later time.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON HIGHWAY NO. 3

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I recall, during a briefing from the Department of Infrastructure recently, the Minister stated that the Highway No. 3 repair budget includes the Behchoko to Yellowknife stretch. We all know the ongoing problems with that stretch of the highway and the amount of resources, labour and financial, that is directed to that stretch of highway on a yearly basis.

My community recognizes the increase in delivery trucks to service the diamond mines, and there are many. Highway No. 3 is one of the busiest highways in the NWT. Highway No. 3 stretches from the junction of Highway No. 1 and Highway No. 3 through Yellowknife. The forgotten stretch is from the junction between Highways No. 1 and 3 to the Deh Cho Bridge. This is all on the south side of the Mackenzie River. As anyone will note as you drive in from the junction, you are suddenly bouncing along the highway from ditch to ditch. I believe this is termed as a "washboard" road, the dreaded word that grader operators are not too fond of. There have been many repairs to various stretches of the highway on the south end. This may contribute to an over-imbalanced highway, considering the increased amount of truck traffic. I will have questions for the infrastructure Minister at the appropriate time. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Deh Cho. Members' statement. Member for Great Slave.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON SENIORS HEALTH CARE SERVICES DURING PANDEMIC

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If there is anything the last year has taught me, it is the importance of communication. The ability to express ourselves so that others can understand us or being easily able to connect with someone in a time of stress goes a long way in allowing us to be happy, productive, functioning members of our society. In many ways, communication is a key component to our positive mental health. Being easily able to connect with someone in a time of

stress goes a long way in allowing us to be happy, productive, functioning members of our society.

In many ways, communication is a key component to our positive mental health. Being able to easily communicate is something that many of us take for granted. Without the ability to communicate, a person can become socially and mentally isolated. For example, if they have trouble hearing, it can be difficult to communicate their needs to others. If their motor skills are impaired, they may not be able to use the technology required to contact the help they need.

In the North, many seniors lack the ability to communicate for a variety of reasons, and as a result, they cannot access the help that they may need. Some of these barriers are financial. For example, for many seniors, purchasing hearing aids is financially prohibitive. Currently, in order for an individual to acquire a hearing aid, they must pay thousands of dollars up front and then be reimbursed from the insurance provider. Many seniors simply do not have the financial means to pay out-of-pocket for items upfront or wait on reimbursement. As well, access to and the cost of batteries are further hardships that our seniors should not have to deal with.

Other barriers are both financial and technological, such as access to and navigating the Internet. As was recently seen, without access to the Internet or an ability to use it well, our vulnerable senior population encountered many issues when trying to book their COVID vaccines. Unable to navigate the online booking, we heard from many seniors that, when they did try to call the number provided, their calls went to voicemail, which was usually full, and they couldn't leave a message; or when they did finally get through to an operator, they were just told to go book online.

Vaccination clinics for seniors need to have dedicated phone lines to assist our most vulnerable population to ensure that they are booked for their vaccines. We have heard from several seniors about the stress and anxiety that navigating the booking system has caused them. Many of our seniors have been living restricted lives for almost a year and desperately want this vaccination in order to resume a better quality of life. To them, not to make it easy for them to access is almost cruel and shows how our seniors often fall through the cracks. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to finish my statement. Thank you.

---Unanimous consent granted.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Advertising in the newspaper and spots on the radio are both places that seniors may hear about vaccine clinics or any news relevant to them.

Posting notices on community bulletin boards or in places that seniors may frequent, such as the supermarket or seniors' centre, would also be useful. However, it is not good enough to just get information out there. There needs to be the proper resources in place to deal with these inquiries, dedicated staff to respond to these calls.

Additionally, beyond just the COVID era, we need to ensure that services are provided to seniors that enhance their lives and support aging in place. Seniors need and deserve affordable access to the Internet, training and programming to aid in technology literacy so that they can use it, as well as specialized mental health and wellness supports specific to their needs.

We need to make these changes now to ensure that we have healthy seniors and elders. We cannot allow one of our most vulnerable populations and, I would argue, one of our most valuable, to continue to fall through the cracks. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Great Slave. Members' statements. Member for Frame Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON GOVERNMENT RENEWAL INITIATIVE

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. On October 30th, the Minister of Finance announced something called the Government Renewal Initiative, and she discussed it again today in the context of the budget. The Minister said, "We are going to use the current climate of recovery and renewal as an opportunity to reimagine how we obtain, manage, and control those financial resources."

The Minister painted a rather grim picture of our finances due to the significant capital spending, which has driven up our short-term debt. The Government Renewal Initiative is supposed to lead to what she calls "value-driven budgeting" through a review of all GNWT programs and services, department by department, with a framework early this year.

It is not clear when Regular MLAs will be engaged or involved in the Government Renewal Initiative and whether that will be before decisions are made. It will also be important to secure buy-in from our workforce and the general public through clear communications. While I believe in program evaluation, I want to make sure that both short- and long-term effects of changes are carefully weighed and considered, as well as differential impacts of any changes on communities, regions, and disadvantaged populations.

I am also concerned that the amount of time and effort that is likely required may not be enough or fast enough to head off the looming fiscal crisis where our debt limits are exceeded. We need to make tough political decisions now on what the priorities are and where the NWT should be. You can't set out trying to realign your spending unless you know what your spending priorities are going to be. I've outlined my priorities, Mr. Speaker. I push for housing, education, childcare, energy self-sufficiency, and a more diversified economy, rather than the massive spending on large infrastructure projects of dubious value that have driven us into increasing debt.

I will have questions later today for the Minister of Finance on the Government Renewal Initiative about whether it can deliver the desired results and how it will be implemented and communicated. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Members' statements. Member for Kam Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON NORTH SLAVE CORRECTIONAL COMPLEX STAFF SAFETY AND MORALE

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last two decades, the safety of staff at the North Slave Correctional Centre has been repeatedly raised as a concern by Members of this House, and here we find ourselves again.

In November 2004, Range Lake MLA Sandy Lee stated that morale, sick leave, abuse, forced overtime, problematic hiring practices, lack of support, inmate-staff confrontation and assaults, and micromanaging plagued North Slave Correctional Centre. Then, in February 2006, Justice Minister Brendan Bell proposed new funding of \$1.4 million to support correctional officer training and staffing in the 2006-2007 Main Estimates.

In March 2013, Justice Minister Glen Abernethy stated that both frontline and management staff need to have appropriate training so that they have the tools, resources, and supports to fulfill their duties while maintaining the safety and well-being of their clients, colleagues, themselves, and the public. The Minister went on to say that corrections staff participated in one-on-one independent surveys to answer questions about their training and working environment.

In June 2015, Range Lake MLA Daryl Dolynny read in a committee report responding to the OAG's report on corrections saying, "The committee is encouraged that the Minister accepted the Auditor General's recommendations and has developed an action plan to implement them." This report

included recommendations to improve management policies and procedures.

In October 2017, Kam Lake MLA Kieron Testart also raised alarms, identifying officer training, equipment, and staff budgets had been cut; that officers were being forced to work exhausting shifts without relief; and that staff morale was low.

Mr. Speaker, in December 2020, CBC reported about an NWT corrections facility workplace assessment, which we heard about from the Minister today, that was commissioned by the Department of Justice. The CBC article quotes a frontline corrections staff as saying, "There is a good chance someone is going to get hurt," and attributes this to poor staffing, employee turnover, training, and morale.

For decades, these themes have been repeated. Staffing concerns have been raised, much-needed funding provided, audits completed, employee engagement offered, and action plans written, but with high staff turnover, continued funding and long-term change is needed. The lip service to the public and staff has remained on point, giving corrections staff hope, but hope without real change just erodes trust even deeper, leaving morale even lower than when you started.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want my comments to be a footnote in a future Member's statement. Today, I want assurances that the Minister of Justice is taking action now to resolve the persistent staffing and morale issues that continue to plague the North Slave Correctional Centre. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. Members' statements. Member for Monfwi.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON LANGUAGE SERVICES

MR. LAFFERTY: Masi, Mr. Speaker. [Translation] Today I would like to speak on behalf of the interpreters, but before that, when we speak here, some days, they speak too fast for the interpreters, because when I have my earphone on, some speakers are really fast speakers. Today, the interpreters are very important for the Northwest Territories. Without them, everyone would be speaking only English. At the hospital, at the court services, in any government offices, they all speak only English. When we look at the interpreters, they are very important to us. We want those services available. This is what I want to speak on in my Member's statement. [Translation ends]

Interpreters and translators allow us, as Dene people, the speakers, the knowledge keepers, to code this in an English-speaking world. Without them, Mr. Speaker, English would be the only

option in the hospitals, health centres, in the courts, and also in the government offices and the Legislative Assembly. Without our professional interpreters, we would be marginalized and isolated. Today, I want to express my deep appreciation for all of the hard work of our interpreters here in this building and outside this building; for the commitment of our interpreters, wherever they are, including right here in the Legislative Assembly.

As important as our Dene interpreters are, their professions are being taken for granted by this government. At one time, interpreting was a thriving profession, with a former language bureau and training and certification program through Aurora College. Now today, Mr. Speaker, interpreters and translators, there are no more than 10 certified interpreters in the entire territory. That is the whole Northwest Territories. Most of these 10 are near retirement, and little has been done to train more.

Mr. Speaker, this is nothing less than an emergency. I intend to ask the government how they are responding to this emergency in the Northwest Territories. Masi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON EULOGY FOR MICHAEL BURCHILL

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, Michael Burchill, former constituency assistant for Kam Lake, Frame Lake, Yellowknife Centre, and my friend, passed away over the holiday season. He was not yet 30 years old, but in his short time on this earth and in our North, he worked tirelessly to help others.

From a young age, Mike felt a calling to serve. Whether volunteering every available hour to a territorial campaign or something small like helping a friend carry groceries, Mike was there. Mike was always there. I don't think I've met anyone who simply cared about others the way Mike did. His altruism was unironic, his love uncomplicated, and his laugh almost too authentic.

Mr. Speaker, Mike didn't spend long in our North, but in that time, he fostered countless friends and helped numerous constituents. Connection was a fundamental principle to him. He felt every person he met deserved what was, in retrospect, the most precious thing he could give: his time. If you met him, you wouldn't have forgotten him. He made sure of that.

As MLAs, I know many of us would be lost without our constituency assistants. They are front-line workers who must master the inner workings of

government. They help people get income assistance, housing, healthcare, and so much more. When I was first elected, Mike helped me set up my office. Many people who have held office in this legislature benefited from his talents. More than a colleague, he was a friend to many. He was my friend, and he will be deeply missed.

Though he is gone, he is not lost to any of us. The time he spent with others will always remain in the memories of those who loved him. His influence can be found in many of the words of Hansard. He believed in the power of words, and never more so when they were spoken within a form of democracy like our Legislative Assembly. I am confident he would be given great solace knowing he enters a form of immortality by becoming words in Hansard: Michael Burchill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family. Members' statements. Member for Nahendeh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON FORT LIARD AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO COVID-19

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to say the situation in Fort Liard continues to improve thanks to the support of the GNWT. Yesterday, I talked about the amazing work that the community of Fort Liard has done, and today it's about the GNWT.

Following confirmation of the case of COVID in the community, the rapid response team was deployed into the community and did an amazing job of testing and informing the community of what had happened. I am happy to say that they have been demobilized. It is my understanding that one of the nurses from the team has remained in the community to follow up on test results and provide support for the local nurses. The health centre continues to provide support for emergencies and patients who require medical attention. As for the first vaccine clinic, it went very well. I am happy to say a good percentage of the residents received their vaccine and are looking forward to the second one within the second month.

In speaking with the mayor, she wanted me to thank the Premier, who reached out to her from the very beginning and continued communicating through the difficult times. As well, she is happy with the support she received from the deputy minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, the associate deputy minister of the COVID secretariat, and the MACA regional staff. They have been helpful during this difficult time. The local and regional COVID secretariat staff have been doing an amazing job, working long hours to ensure the

residents' safety and helping out at the border. The government developed a communication plan called the Dear Fort Liard campaign with CKLB, and it was a hit. Many messages of support were offered to the community members. It is my understanding that APTN National News will be doing a story on the campaign.

Mr. Speaker, school staff were well-prepared and innovative in their approach to teaching and learning in response to the school shutdown. They were quickly able to prepare and make remote learning packages available for the students. Chromebooks and Turbo Sticks were delivered to the high school students to enable them to complete and submit their final project online.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment implemented new service delivery options for income assistance to ensure continued support for residents. These alternative measures provided safe, efficient access to income support programs and services and allowed for income exemptions of other government funding intended to assist residents in lockdown.

On behalf of the community, I'd like to thank the government from the bottom of my heart for all the help they have and are providing for the community during this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Nahendeh. Members' statements. Member for Hay River North.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON EULOGY FOR PAUL DELOREY

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, I would like to commemorate one of my predecessors, the Honourable Paul Delorey, who passed away on New Year's Day earlier this year. Paul served Hay River as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, he served the Northwest Territories as the Speaker of the House, and he served the community as a prolific volunteer and outstanding citizen.

Paul was first elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1999, defeating six other candidates and earning the privilege of representing the newly created constituency of Hay River North. He was elected again in 2003, that time by acclamation, and for a final time in 2007. In 2011, he announced that he would not seek office again, retiring with a perfect 3-0 record. To this day, constituents tell me stories about the effort that Paul put into assisting them, sometimes hinting, I think, that I had better live up to the standard that he set.

In addition to serving his constituents, Paul served the entire territory as Speaker of this House in the

15th and 16th Legislative Assemblies. My colleagues who had the pleasure of working with Speaker Delorey have always spoken highly of his performance in that position, citing his character, his professionalism, and the seriousness with which he approached the role.

Mr. Speaker, the level of civility displayed in this House differentiates our Legislative Assembly from virtually all legislatures in Canada and, frankly, around the world. We pride ourselves on our Members' ability to have frank discussions and hold the government to account while maintaining respect for each other and upholding the dignity of this institution. It is no accident that we have been able to maintain this delicate balance. Speaker Delorey was keenly aware that his job was to maintain this balance for the sake of our territory, and he did so masterfully. This afforded him the respect of his fellow legislators, as well as Speakers across Canada, among whom he was universally admired. During his tenure, Speaker Delorey modelled to his eventual successors the qualities that a Speaker should possess and, in that way, our Assembly has continued to benefit from his work all these years later.

Speaker Delorey was also responsible for bringing the Legislative Assembly closer to the people of the NWT in a number of ways. Thanks to his efforts, the Legislative Assembly's television channel is one of only 14 channels that the CRTC requires cable and satellite providers to carry and include in all basic packages. This has allowed us to broadcast our proceedings across Canada and rebroadcast in a number of Indigenous languages, which is something no other jurisdiction can lay claim to.

Speaker Delorey introduced the Mace Tour, which brings the Mace, the Speaker, the Clerk, the Sergeant-at-Arms, and more to schools across the territory, to teach youth and communities about consensus government and the work of the Assembly. He also reinforced and greatly expanded the Page program and is responsible for ensuring that youth from all regions of the territory have the opportunity to come and work and learn in the Legislative Assembly. All these efforts fundamentally changed how the public understands and interacts with the Legislative Assembly.

Paul's contributions were by no means confined to his work as MLA or Speaker; far from it. When he was named Hay River's Citizen of the Year in 2019, it was really a recognition of his five decades of tireless volunteerism. His knack for fundraising, his 40 years of coaching, and the sheer, incalculable number of hours he spent volunteering are the kinds of contributions that communities are built on. There is no doubt that he was a pillar of the community.

Mr. Speaker, there is so much more that could be said. I haven't even mentioned curling. Paul touched many people's lives, whether as a colleague, a friend, a teammate, a coach, a mentor. He will be missed by many, none more than his family. My condolences go out to his wife, Davida, his children, and his grandchildren. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Hay River North. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and community. Members' statements. Item 5, returns to oral questions. Item 6, recognition of visitors in the gallery. Item 7, replies to budget address, day 1 of 7. Item 8, acknowledgments. Member for Great Slave.

Acknowledgements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT 2-19(2):
JOYCE WILLIAMS 80TH BIRTHDAY

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to recognize Joyce Williams, a constituent of the community of Great Slave and a long-time Yellowknifer, who celebrated her 80th birthday on January 13th. We wish her many more happy and healthy birthdays to come. Thank you.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Great Slave. Acknowledgements. Item 9, oral questions. Member for Deh Cho.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 493-19(2):
HIGHWAY NO. 3

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I alluded to the washboard situation on the stretch of highway from Junction No. 1 and 3 in my Member's statement. My question to the Infrastructure Minister related to that stretch is: Are there any immediate plans to repair that stretch of highway anytime soon? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Deh Cho. Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member will be happy because the Department of Infrastructure is resurfacing Highway No. 3 from kilometre 0 to 23 this year, and double layer of chip seal next year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi for that good news. I note the low employment in the community of Fort Providence, not to mention the number of Aurora College heavy equipment operators that have

completed the program but are not given any opportunities for work in the field. My question to the Minister and a possible solution, their shortfalls in employment, unemployment: Is it possible to look into the benefits to providing training, employment program, and at the same time, providing the much-needed repairs?

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: We're always looking at innovative ways to get local Northerners to work because it forms an important part of our bid process, and this is something we have done in the past with the Tlicho All-Season Road. We were able to work with the contractors to be able to provide training and opportunities for some of the local citizens to give them some of the skills that they can move forward with their training.

MR. BONNETROUGE: That's very promising. I like that idea that we use as many northern contractors and northern labour as possible, especially if we can move forward on training programs. Many of these people that come out of heavy equipment operator programs, they are not hired by contractors because they lack experience. This type of work, and there's lots of work in the Northwest Territories highways, enables them to gain more experience on the highway systems operating equipment, flag persons, and whatnot. It's much needed. I realize that some contractors, northern contractors will need southern or other contractors that are experienced in road repair or chip sealing, but as long as a majority of the workers are northern content and for the contractors' sake, also. Mr. Speaker, it is more of a comment, and I don't have any more questions. That's good news that we're going to be moving on this project.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member. Taken as a comment. Minister's reply.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I enjoy the comment and some of the good news. However, I do want to speak a little bit more, and I should have answered this in his first question. I do want to elaborate a little bit more on some of the work that infrastructure has already invited a public tender, so we're doing a quarry at kilometre 188, which is Highway No. 1. The tender is closing February 25th to be able to produce some necessary work for the Highway No. 3 resurfacing.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure the Member will be happy, the survey contract will be awarded to Sub-Arctic Surveys this week to be able to survey Highway No. 3, which is at kilometre 0 to 23. Once the survey is complete, department staff will design the section. We are looking at a multi-year public tender for Highway No. 3 resurfacing, to be able to start this work this June-July 2021. Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Thebacha.

QUESTION 494-19(2):
ECONOMIC RECOVERY

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. BDIC loan payments to businesses are not being processed right now, but the interest rates are being charged on principal loans, therefore accumulating compound interest charges. Payments are being deferred for all BDIC business loans until April 1st, 2021. Can the Minister tell us if she believes the Government of the Northwest Territories should extend this time frame by six months or more and consider eliminating all interest being charged to BDIC loans during this pandemic? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The BDIC is right now in the midst of a strategic planning process. They are halfway through. They've had their first meeting just before Christmas and are having a second one shortly. I know that their board is made up of business owners and business persons from across the Northwest Territories. I am sure they are looking at this. I have had conversations with their CEO who also assures me that this is something that is under consideration, whether or not to defer their loan payments further or how long to do so.

As to the interest rates or forgiveness of debts expressly, Mr. Speaker, they do not have the legislative authority to do that. Only FNB can be forgiving loans, but really at this point, my understanding is that businesses are continuing to communicate with BDIC. They are happy with the work that is being done there to support them and that that work is going to be ongoing. I expect more to come, Mr. Speaker, well in advance of April 1st. Thank you.

MS. MARTSELOS: Most of the financial aid to date given to the business community has come from the federal government. Can the Minister provide us with an exact amount that the Government of the Northwest Territories has contributed to the business community in relation to the pandemic aid?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: This actually involves more than just one department. The funding to airlines alone has been into the \$20 million range on behalf of the GNWT. As well, of course, there are a variety of other programs. There are projections of what we expect to spend, and then, there are also actuals. I want to commit to getting a more specific number back to the Member

because, even as I'm sitting here, I imagine it comes as no surprise departments quickly try their best to do the math as I'm sitting and waiting for an answer to come in.

The simple fact is, we are into the millions of dollars in different programs. There's been money that's been spent in the tourism industry on GRIT. There's money that's now going to small businesses in terms of bookkeeping. There's money that is going out under Finance. Again, as I've said, to the airline industry. There is a variety of these different pots going, and some of them have the pots to which they are expecting to spend the full amount. Some haven't spent their full amount yet. I will certainly get a final number, but I do want to say that there are lot of pots of money. There are a lot of things happening, and yes, we are using resources of the federal government. That's the responsible way to do this is to fill the gaps that aren't filled by the federal government and to help support and enhance their programs.

MS. MARTSELOS: More clarity on some of that second question would be great. I know that we have been using federal funds and nothing from the Northwest Territories' government funds. The NWT has a very small business community that is reliant on government economic activity to be sustained. Can the Minister tell us if she thinks, as Minister of ITI and Finance, if there should be a balanced public and private sector economy in the Northwest Territories?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: My own opinions on the matter really are not the answer. We conducted the budget dialogues this summer to have that kind of conversation with the residents of the Northwest Territories. As ITI Minister, I have an opportunity to speak with business representatives from across different organizations as groups, as well as directly with members of the business community. We are a small economy, and it's not new that we remain an economy that is not particularly diversified. It is one that does have a large public sector reliance. I don't expect that to necessarily change in the near future, but yes, of course.

The simple answer is to say yes, it needs to be balanced. Supports need to be balanced and our efforts to grow our economy and diversify need to be balanced. There will continue to be anchor industries, just as there will be anchor industries in each community. It certainly is the intention of, I think, this government and the budget that's here today, to continue to support all of those things so that we can have growth in individual industries in smaller regions, as well as in the anchor industries, such as mining and the mineral resources sector, while also providing stability through the public service.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary. Member for Thebacha.

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Minister is responsible for both ITI and Finance. Can the Minister tell us if she would consider providing a one-time direct financial aid package to all small- and medium-sized businesses that are majority-owned by residents who reside in the NWT? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: These are really the kinds of questions that need to be asked, as we are right now engaging, as the Premier described yesterday, in putting together a COVID relief plan. These are exactly the kinds of questions to be asked. I am happy to answer them. That said, some of the materials put out today in conjunction with the budget recognize and reflect that the recovery already has been uneven. Some sectors and industries have recovered, and some sectors and industries simply have not experienced the impacts to the same degree as others. We want to be able to leverage the resources that we have, including those of the federal government, so that all sectors of the economy can continue to recover if they need to, all sectors can grow, and that means really a more nuanced response.

We have had already significant impacts on the airline industry and significant funding to the airline industry. Tourism has seen particular impacts and has also seen some specific funds directed in that regard. There is already the Northern Business Relief Fund, which helps with fixed costs. That is largely a CanNor fund, and it is one that seems to be working. Really, Mr. Speaker, what we need to do now is find where those gaps are so that everyone can continue to benefit from recovery and relief in a more even way and that growth continues to happen in an even way. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Monfwi.

QUESTION 495-19(2):
LANGUAGE SERVICES

MR. LAFFERTY: Masi, Mr. Speaker. [Translation] I made a Member's statement on interpreters because those positions are very important, and we want more training. I'm going to ask the ECE Minister. [Translation ends]

My questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, and they relate to the government's commitment to training and certifying professional Dene language interpreters and translators. Mr. Speaker, the Minister's Indigenous Languages Action Plan set goals for the development of Dene interpreters and translators. Those goals include in-house training and also

partnering with external organizations for further training and certification. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister describe the progress his department has made in pursuit of those goals? I would like to hear more of a timeline, Mr. Speaker. Masi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Monfwi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Member for his continued advocacy on this topic. I agree that people need to be able to access the government, and they should be able to access it in their own language. The Member is correct that we do have an action plan, and it has some items related to this.

In a broad sense, there are a number of initiatives that the government is undertaking. There is a mentor-apprentice program whereby fluent speakers, such as the Member, would apprentice a younger -- it doesn't have to be younger, necessarily, but someone who doesn't speak the language. There is funding provided for this, and this is a way to help a new generation of speakers gain those skills.

We are working on developing a two-year diploma program in conjunction with the University of Victoria, which has a lot of experience in this, and that would be an adult immersion program to get speakers to the point where they could become interpreters. The long-term goal is to have that program be the predecessor of, perhaps, a third-year interpreter-translator program. It is on the horizon.

In terms of some of the other goals or projects happening, this March, actually, the department is putting together a virtual gathering of the 30-plus translators and interpreters that are currently in the territory. This is to identify specific needs for ongoing professional development so that we can better support those who are translating now, even if they don't have the professional certifications, and to get input into ways that we can attract new interpreter-translators and expand the field.

Those are some of the things that are happening. I have to commend the Member that it was his very friendly badgering that I think moved some of these things forward. This is an example of Members of this House working together to move things forward and make progress. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. LAFFERTY: [Translation] Regarding the training, it's very important to us. I want to ask another question. [Translation ends] [Microphone turned off]... I am involved in that. I am teaching a non-language speaker, so basically, I am a teacher to this student. It's my daughter that I am teaching, and it is very rewarding to be a part of that. The

Minister has indicated that in the committee's statement that I'm walking the talk. This needs to happen. I am encouraging a lot more people to get involved. Maro Sundberg is involved in that, as well, which is great.

Mr. Speaker, the second question I do have is based on partnership. Could the Minister tell us precisely what external partnerships he assigned for the training and certification of interpreters and translators? Could he update us on the partnerships that are currently involved in this process?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: I don't have that level of detail with me right now, but, for example, the mentorship-apprenticeship program is in partnership with Indigenous governments, and I said we are partnering with the University of Victoria and, hopefully, with Aurora College, to develop a program that we can deliver throughout the North. I can get that information for the Member.

MR. LAFFERTY: I am very interested in the in-house training, and I am glad that the Minister is gathering, over the video-teleconferencing, those experts at the community level in March. I would like to know, because this will be in-house training, more specifically, have there been any dedicated extra funds for in-house translator-interpreter training in pursuit of those goals that I mentioned earlier?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Again, I don't have those specific numbers. I am not sure how this is being funded. Perhaps it's out of the current budget that there have been some savings on travel, for example, so maybe that is what is funding this. I am not quite sure, but I can find that out and let the Member know.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary. Member for Monfwi.

MR. LAFFERTY: Masi, Mr. Speaker. Yes, if the Minister can provide that detailed information, that will be very helpful. My last question obviously is: What would be the process? Okay, there is a gathering in March, and obviously, there is a process in place. Can the Minister describe, because I am very interested in in-house training that is going to be happening, but at the same time, there is Aurora College that is involved, as well. It has been involved in the past. Can the Minister describe how Aurora College has been enlisted to ensure that we have a sufficient number of professional interpreters and also translators in the system in the Northwest Territories? Could the Minister provide that if he has it now or provide that later, as well? Mr. Speaker, masi.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: I can provide that information to the Member along with the other information I committed to. I just want to note that Aurora College will be becoming arm's length in the next couple of years, and we can no longer say, "This is what we are going to do at the college." In the future, the university I see has a very strong language aspect to it. To me, it would be one of the highlights, one of the selling points of the university, so I foresee very strong partnerships going forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Nunakput.

QUESTION 496-19(2):
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

MR. JACOBSON: Mr. Speaker, today, my statement was in regard to the COVID pandemic and how it changed communities in Nunakput. I am wondering: I am asking the health Minister if she could possibly look and work with me in regard to putting a team together to go to my communities and across the territory if possible, a grief counsellor, a few counsellors, to go into the communities for four or five days to actually sit with the people and listen to the hardships that they are going through and try to work with them to help them. I am hoping the Minister and maybe even the MACA Minister team up to find the funds so that it is possible to do something like this across our territory. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Nunakput. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Member for Nunakput for his question. Mr. Speaker, we have a Community Counselling Program available in every community, who would be able to provide this service to residents. They would not have to wait for a travelling team. They could connect with the Community Counselling Program and arrange to either have a socially distanced appointment or a virtual appointment so that they could get the kind of help that the Member is talking about. Thank you.

MR. JACOBSON: Our counsellor just left Tuktoyaktuk. He has gone to Behchoko, so they took our counsellor, but good for him. I am happy. He wanted a change, right. As MLA for Nunakput, I am obligated for the health and safety of my people that I represent. I am asking the Minister: Could we find, through the COVID secretariat, through MACA, is there a possible way? I used to take people, athletes, to go up and do hockey schools and talk about bullying and stuff like that in my communities, but this is different. This is more a thing we could work towards, of getting somebody professional into the communities instead of tel-

emerg or telehealth or whatever you want to do. You have to see the whites of their eyes, I guess you could say, to actually try to help. I think something like this is going to be really good if it's possible to hit even the Beaufort-Delta, our communities in the Beaufort-Delta, where people in the small communities are really hurting with different types of grief and depression because there is nothing going on. Mr. Speaker, I am asking the Minister to try to work with me, with the MACA Minister, the Premier, to try to get something like this started for the region.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Again, I thank the Member for Nunakput for bringing this forward. It has been a very difficult time. We know that. There have been many deaths, not because of COVID necessarily but just in the natural course of doing things, and because of the limitation on funerals, the grieving has not taken place in the way we are accustomed to. This has left people feeling at a loose ends. I cannot promise to bring resources to his community, but what I can say is that we will endeavour to fill that counselling position as soon as possible and that, in the meantime, there are phone and video resources available. If anyone is able to drive into Inuvik, they might be able to make an appointment there and see a counsellor. We have instituted a new process for taking people into counselling, where there is no waiting list. There is no waiting time at all. You can be seen on the day that you make your appointment.

MR. JACOBSON: The only people who could drive in are from Tuktoyaktuk. I represent the most northerly riding in the territory. Our government gets \$38,000 per year per person to provide services. Our government is obligated to provide service in regard to that and to our communities. I really want our government to take this recommendation seriously, to try to work with me. Just say yes. I will use some of my constituency budget when we fly into the communities to go and do it with them. I really want to know. The pandemic changed everything. To try to fly into Inuvik to see a counsellor would be, from Sachs Harbour, probably \$700 to \$800 one way, from Ulukhaktok, a thousand, so we can't do it. It's too expensive. We need help. Communities need help in the delta. Communities need help in my riding. My people need help, so take my recommendations and just say yes.

HON. JULIE GREEN: I do appreciate the Member's passion for helping his constituents, and I do appreciate that three of the four communities in his riding are not accessible by road. He started off by talking about his own community. I have to say that it's easier for his constituents to use the helpline to make a virtual appointment for counselling than to wait for Health and Social Services to fill empty positions in the community or to gather the

resources together for a travelling team, so I really encourage him to contact me about the resources that are available right now that he can refer his constituents to.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary. Member for Nunakput.

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Minister for that, but I just want to remind the Minister and the government that they are responsible for all people in the Northwest Territories. During this COVID-19 pandemic, please provide services to my people who I represent in Nunakput and across the delta. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take that as a comment.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Kam Lake.

QUESTION 497-19(2):
ADDRESSING EMPLOYEE ISSUES AT NORTH
SLAVE CORRECTIONAL COMPLEX

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Justice in regard to the corrections staffing at our correctional facilities. The Minister made reference to a report, a workplace assessment report that was commissioned by the deputy minister of the Department of Justice. Did the Minister plan to table this report? If yes, when? If not, how does the Minister intend to be transparent in how they will deal with the concerns raised by staff in the report? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. Minister of Justice.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for her persistent advocacy on behalf of her constituents. This is a very concerning situation with some history. The Member's statement was quite a retort to my statement, and it explained the long history of this. I will not be tabling that report. When this report was initiated, the staff were told that it would be kept confidential.

While there was obviously a risk of it being released once it was distributed to all staff and to other parties, that was a risk that we knew we had to take. Despite the fact that it is publicly available, I will still be treating it as confidential and upholding that bargain that we had with staff. However, I have committed to providing updates as we make progress because, if I do not stand up here and say what we have been doing, it could just be another report that gets shelved. If I don't hold myself

publicly accountable, we risk that happening, so I will do my best to ensure that we keep the public and the Members updated. Thank you.

MS. CLEVELAND: I hear the Minister saying that he won't table the report because it was completed by employees with the intention that their words would be kept confidential, so I can only respect the Minister's decision for that one. In regard to what the Minister said today, the Minister made reference to a deputy ministers' meeting that was held in December where they discussed updating training, more recruitment, recertification. This House has seen an influx of training and an influx of dollars before. I'm just wondering how this will be different than what this House has heard before, and how this is actually going to create the change that Ministers before this one, and now this Minister, has also said will come as a result of these moves.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: The Member is right to be sceptical. She wouldn't be here if she wasn't; none of us would. Governments say lots of things, and sometimes they don't happen. I don't know if there is anything I could say that would assure me as a Regular Member. It has to be proven. We have to actually do the work. We have to come back on a regular basis and show that we're doing the work, and that's really the only way to prove ourselves.

I will note that there was one difference, something that's never been done before. That is that this is not just an effort of the department, and it's not just an effort of the department staff. We also have the UNW involved at a level they've never been involved at before, with reporting to the deputy ministers of Finance, of Justice, and to the president of the UNW. I think that gives a much stronger voice to the staff than has happened previously, and it's going to force a lot more collaboration and more positive outcomes.

MS. CLEVELAND: One of the common undertones of what I'm hearing from the Minister today, I believe, has to do with communication; communication amongst staff, communication with members of the department, and also communication with this House and with the public. I think that's really, really important, an important kind of undertone to carry through this entire process. With that, what I'd like to know is: Part of getting buy-in for this process and from front-line staff is including them in it. In order to create positive change, the people who you are trying to create change for need to be involved in the process. Also, given that each of our facilities, our correctional facilities in the Northwest Territories, are so different and have such a different clientele, I am wondering what the Minister will do to ensure that staff are part of the process and have a say in

what changes occur and how they occur at each facility.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: I think communication causes most problems, not just in corrections, but everywhere. Lack of communication really leads to misunderstandings; it leads to problems not being resolved. The first thing that happened after this report came out is that senior staff, senior management, went to the different facilities. They presented this information, and they listened to the staff to hear what they had to say directly, not through a consultant. From that, they are compiling a "what we heard" report so that they can then distribute it to staff and say, "Are we hearing you correctly?" Because, sometimes, when you tell the government something, they don't necessarily hear what you're saying. Maybe they hear what they want to hear, so we are starting a feedback loop. That is one of the first things.

As part of the plan going forward, there is also a communications plan, so that everyone will know how they are going to be engaged and you can ensure that it's happening. There will be something to fall back on or to check off the list: This has happened. That's going to hold people accountable for making sure that communication happens.

As everyone here knows, communication is tough. Sometimes things change quickly, so we just have to put the effort into it and do our best. That's the plan. I think, if there was better communication 20 years ago, the Member wouldn't be able to make that statement about all of the past statements that have been made, so this can be beat. I've talked to some employees from the correction service, and they tell me about times when things were good. There were times when there was good communication between staff and management, and so I know it can happen again. This is not something that we can't overcome.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary. Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I heard the Minister refer to two separate reports, one just now and one in their Minister's statement. The one in the Minister's statement was an HR plan, and this one was a "what we heard" report. I'm wondering if the Minister can clarify if those are two separate reports or one and the same, and if both reports are intended to be tabled in this House during this session or when we can expect to see them in committee, as well. Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: There is an overarching framework here that is going to guide how we move forward. Under that, there is a communications plan, so everyone knows how people are going to

communicated with. The "what we heard" report is really when the management went out in December and talked to staff. They put together a report saying, "This is what we heard. Are we hearing you correctly?"

Those are all different documents. There are a number of moving parts here. I'm happy to keep the committee updated to the best that I can. There are some operational and security sensitivities with things like the framework that would prohibit me from tabling a document like that. That being said, we do have to prove that we are making progress, so we'll find a way to ensure that committee is kept up to date. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes.

QUESTION 498-19(2):
CULTURALLY SENSITIVE HEALTHCARE
SERVICES

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have all heard of Brian Sinclair, Joyce Echaquan, and our own Hugh Pakik. These situations were caused by someone's opinion. Who advocates before it gets this serious? My question for the Minister of Health and Social Services is: What option does someone have immediately if they feel they are not getting the help they need or feel that they have been treated unfairly or with discrimination in the Health and Social Services Department, which includes the hospitals, clinics, health centres, and social services offices?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question. My suggestion would be that the person and/or the people who are with that person speak to the nurse in charge or the patient care coordinator. If they continue to be unsatisfied with the answers, they should call their MLA, who will be able to direct them to quality assurance and other resources that will help them to be heard. Thank you.

MS. SEMMLER: Next time, I will make sure, when I'm treated badly, I'll call myself; and I did. Would the Minister consider a position in each of the hospitals or regional centres that would assist with being an advocate for patients who need help navigating the system? Because not everybody, when they come in from a small community, knows where to go, knows how to communicate, and they are afraid of the healthcare system. We do have history of not trusting the healthcare system in this country, Indigenous people.

HON. JULIE GREEN: I'd like to think that everybody in our large healthcare facilities, and in our small ones, too, is a navigator who is there to help patients access the care that they come to the hospital or the healthcare centre for. We do have the quality assurance people, although they tend not to be standing in the foyer of the hospital, ready to give advice, but there are people who work at the front desk in the Inuvik Regional Hospital and at the Stanton Territorial Hospital who should be able to direct patients to the places they need to go and to direct them in the language of their choice. We have committed to providing culturally safe healthcare, and being able to direct people efficiently and in their language is certainly central to that.

MS. SEMMLER: I hear the Minister, and I hear what she says. We do have great staff, but not necessarily are these staff trained to be able to understand a lot of the systems. This government assisted Aurora College to create a nursing program 20-plus years ago. We've had 20-plus years of graduates of nursing. The goal of that program was to have Indigenous nurses working in their own communities for their own people. It's still not happening.

I would like to ask the Minister again if we can have patient advocates and have them be nurses in these hospitals. If we can't have nurses in these hospitals, then can we at least have nurses who can help our Indigenous people work through the system, if they feel that they have been discriminated against or if they don't even understand what they are doing? They're missing appointments. Their medical travel is being booked on the day before they have to leave, and they have no escort. There are multiple things, but I think it needs a health background to be able to navigate the system.

HON. JULIE GREEN: I understand what the Member is getting to there, that medical travel to a larger facility like the Inuvik Regional Hospital or Stanton Territorial Hospital can be quite a daunting prospect, and people may not feel comfortable asking the questions that they need to in order to have the answers that they need to navigate the system. I am not aware that there is a particular navigator who is on call in Stanton Territorial Hospital or in the Inuvik Regional Hospital, but that is certainly something that I can inquire about.

I think the longer-term solution is to continue to train people in cultural competency so that they have a better understanding of some of the history and background that people bring to healthcare with them, a background of not being served well, in some cases not having good interactions, and to be able to work with people on the basis that they are

not comfortable, likely, right where they are and who need some additional help.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you Minister. Final supplementary, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hear the Minister. I know that we are supposed to be rolling out a very detailed cultural awareness campaign soon, and all of the GNWT staff are going to be there; but there is no course in the world that is going to change somebody who doesn't want to take it. That's the issue. These are the issues. Our people are still going to be afraid of the healthcare system, so they're not going to speak up; they're not going to advocate for themselves. I, again, just want to push the Minister to really look into these types of positions for our people in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: I realize that there is no easy fix in this area. I don't believe that cultural competency training is optional in the Health and Social Services world. We have committed ourselves to providing culturally sensitive care, in part because of the case that the Member spoke about and other more recent cases that we have heard about on the news. We want to provide a service in which all people in the NWT, whether they are newcomers to the NWT or they have been here since time immemorial, feel comfortable accessing the services that they need to live their best lives. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Great Slave.

QUESTION 499-19(2):
HEALTH CARE SERVICES TO SENIORS
DURING THE PANDEMIC

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Can the Minister tell us what her department is doing to increase supports for seniors who are aging in place and maybe feeling the mental health impacts due to the restrictions around COVID-19, and whether or not she plans to increase those supports, given the CPHO's orders are likely to remain in place until the fall? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Great Slave. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to say that there are a number of services in place for seniors. Because homecare is in place in most communities, they have been providing some additional supports, such as phone calls and visits, that are above and beyond what

they would have provided before COVID. In communities where there are usually day programs, there have been staff who have been reassigned to provide support one-on-one with people because people are not gathering for the day program at this point, given the COVID-19 pandemic.

Within long-term care, there have been extra efforts to screen residents for depression, knowing that that is a possibility, as well as providing for family and friends to visit in very controlled circumstances; to deliver letters on behalf of families; to organize virtual calls, so that there is that connection between the people in long-term care and the people who love them.

As well, the mental health supports that are available to every person in the NWT are, of course, available to seniors, and that includes the Community Counselling Program, which I spoke about earlier; the NWT Help Line; and the on-the-land healing fund, anything that the community is doing with on-the-land; and of course, through their healthcare provider. If they disclose that they are feeling depressed or lonely, it will be a response by the primary healthcare provider to assist the senior to find the services that they need. Thank you.

MS. NOKLEBY: I was asking about aging in place, not necessarily about the seniors' homes, but I am glad to hear that they are doing that. I don't really think that many of the seniors who are isolating and feeling the depression of COVID impacts are going to be heading out on the land, so I am not sure that that's really a support to seniors aging in place. Moving on, I would like to know how many people are over the age of 60 in the Northwest Territories, and how many of those seniors have received at least one round of the vaccination?

HON. JULIE GREEN: According to the NWT Bureau of Statistics, as of July 1, 2020, there are approximately 6,594 persons aged 60 and older in the NWT, and I will have to get back to the Member with the number who have received vaccines who are over 60.

MS. NOKLEBY: When the Minister returns with that information, I am going to guess she is also going to have to come back with the next question I have, which is: What is the current COVID vaccine distribution broken down by demographic group?

I have also asked the Minister, and not received a response, to how many extra doses have been given out. A response received of "we're not tracking that" is not acceptable to me. All you need to do is take the number of appointments you have, the numbers of doses administered, and subtract them to find out how many extra vials have been opened and distributed to people of non-priority groups.

HON. JULIE GREEN: We are giving the vaccine on a priority group basis. Everybody who lives in a small community without a resident nurse and who is over 18 has had the opportunity to receive the first dose. We have also, of course, prioritized people who live and work in long-term care and other congregate settings like jails and shelters. We have also prioritized frontline staff because of their connection to healthcare, and we have prioritized people who have chronic or multiple medical conditions. We have not broken it out by demographic. It is broken out by need, as determined by the Chief Public Health Officer. That's how it has been broken out.

The question about tracking the number of people who have had doses: We have given out 12,241 doses so far. We are, to be perfectly honest, putting a lot of time into keeping up with the Public Health Agency of Canada reporting, and we have no additional time to answer the Member's question.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Great Slave.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am not really very concerned with how the department would report their statistics. The priority groups actually would be considered to be a demographic, the demographic being they are high priority for different reasons. I would still consider that to be a breakdown by demographic group and would appreciate having those numbers.

Moving on, how would seniors who are not technologically savvy reach out to the department to get help navigating not only the COVID vaccine forms online, but any other online services that they may be required to use? Is there a specialized help line for seniors to call that will actually be answered and they can get people to walk them through the programs? Thank you.

HON. JULIE GREEN: As the Member may know, there is a helpline for seniors. Seniors could call there. They could call their local health centre. They could call the system navigator, health system navigator. I invite the Member to look that up and put it on her Facebook page. We, as a department, realize that people at different ages have different communication styles. We are fully aware that elders are generally not using computers and other digital methods of communication, so we have made an effort to communicate with them on local radio stations, through the newspaper, through posters, and even through door-to-door visits in some cases, to make sure that they are aware of the opportunity to be vaccinated. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

QUESTION 500-19(2):
GOVERNMENT RENEWAL INITIATIVE

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My question is for the Minister of Finance on the Government Renewal Initiative. The Minister announced back in October, the Government Renewal Initiative, but it was a little bit lean on details. Can the Minister provide any more details now on the steps, stages or phases of the Government Renewal Initiative, how Regular MLAs will be involved, and how it is going to be communicated to our workforce and the general public? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I actually love talking about government renewal, but I'll try not to take the full ten minutes. We're starting out right now with the Department of ECE and Department of Finance. The government renewal process takes two steps. I should start by mentioning that all departments have been involved quite extensively in terms of looking at government renewal and looking at the program evaluation process in understanding how it's going to unfold. This has certainly been a government-wide process, government-wide initiative, and one that I think has already been well-communicated within government departments, and materials have already gone to committee. I'm happy to do a detailed briefing with committee and provide even further information to them.

I can say that, when a department goes through the process that is envisioned as of right now, that we're looking at two parts. The first part is to gather the information about the programs, do an inventory of what programs are there, and to then go through an evaluation system of those programs. There will be involvement from frontline workers. That is critical that the frontline workers be involved. They are often the ones that understand where the efficiencies lie and what the value to the residents has been. There's quite a bit that I could unpack within all that, Mr. Speaker. I will leave it at that, and see if there is, perhaps, another follow-up that could guide what direction or what further information the Member is looking for at this time. Thank you.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for the Minister's statement in response to my question. Look, I want to be generous here. The Minister has shared information with us as Regular MLAs. My questions here today are to try to get this out into the public because nobody really knows what is going on. Can the Minister tell us: She just mentioned that Finance and I believe Education, Culture and Employment are the first two

departments that are going to be up for review. Is there a full schedule that she could provide to, perhaps, table in the House so that the public and our workforce knows what's going on?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: I can certainly provide the expected schedule of having two departments go through the process over time, and we're looking in general to maintain one larger department and one smaller department going through the process. The reason for that is: Essentially, it's internal capacity. The certified evaluators that we have, the financial analysts that we have, and individual departments, it is quite a lot of work for them, and we're trying to do this by funding internally as much as possible using different types of techniques. Trying to manage doing it quickly, but still doing it in a way that we can, again, not overburden departments as we go through. Yes, ECE and Finance are the first two up, if you will, and we're expecting this to take somewhere between three and four years to cover all 11 departments. I can provide how we expect that to go for each of the two parts for two sets of departments over time. I'll be happy to provide that.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that, and I look forward to seeing that document tabled in the House soon. Just in case anyone's interested, I do believe in a program, a strong program evaluation, but I'm just not sure the Government Renewal Initiative is the right way to go about this. I'm also worried that short-term savings will eclipse long-term benefits, and that the differential impacts of changes on disadvantaged populations will not be adequately considered. What assurance can the Minister provide that the Government Renewal Initiative will adequately consider the long-term and differential impacts of changes to programs and services?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: I can't say enough: This isn't simply a reduction exercise. By going about this in a way that is methodical and that relies on evaluation rather than just cherry-picking or targeting from somewhere within senior ranks of what programs or services we think might not provide value, that is not the way to make an evidence-based decision about good government value. That is exactly why we want to go department by department, why we want to actually look and do that inventory as to what is, in fact, being offered and then involve the frontline workers to ensure that we understand the true value and benefit of all the individual programs and services that we offer. This is a way to be, in fact, evidence-based when we're making decisions, and not just say that we're evidence-based. We're going to go out and actually gather the evidence that shows the government what we do, what we do well, and where we have duplication.

This is actually a chance to plug one other thing that matters deeply to me, and that's the GBA plus, gender-based analysis plus approach to making decisions within the government. You will recall that I had said that all decisions are now going to be analyzed with that lens of GBA plus, which looks not only at gender but all identity factors. Although we have that now, it's happening, it is working its way through, I still think there is a lot that can be done there. As we go through this process, that lens can continue to be brought forward. I am confident in saying that we're going to be looking at how government renewal, how the programs and services we offer are impacting different people in different ways, and doing so, as I've said, I believe, in the budget speech, so that we are more equitable across the Northwest Territories.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for her passion today. I'm worried, though, that a lot of time and effort is going to go into this Government Renewal Initiative and it will not deliver the results we need to have our government going off a fiscal cliff. I think that's being driven by overspending on large infrastructure projects. We need to make some tough decisions and choices now because we can't possibly accomplish all the items in Cabinet's mandate. What assurance can the Minister give me today that the results of the Government Renewal Initiative are going to be delivered on time rather than making tough decisions right now? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: We have to. I'm inclined to sit down. I suspect that that, in response, won't be satisfactory to my colleague across the floor. We have to get this right, and we make tough decisions all the time.

Today, we tabled a \$2 billion budget. In order to make tough decisions, it is better, in my view, to do that based on evidence and to do that based on evidence that is gathered methodically and to do that in a way that is based on evidence that looks at programs and services across the Northwest Territories with a vision of value. We want to have value and not just -- it needs to be methodical and evaluative. That, Mr. Speaker, is really at the core of what the Government Renewal Initiative will be.

The first two departments that go through, Finance and ECE, should have those processes complete in time to see impacts on the business planning that goes through for the next budget cycle. That, then, will allow everyone to see that we can, in fact, be making tough decisions. It will, in fact, demonstrate where those decision points may lie. The tough decisions happen all the way through. I mean,

budgeting is a process that I've said many times is cyclical. It takes all year. In fact, I suspect the folks over in Finance are going to be starting on the 2022-2023 budget very soon.

Tough decisions have to happen continually. We can't wait until the future, but we also can't put all the eggs in the basket and say that it's all because of the infrastructure plan and the infrastructure projects. If we don't have infrastructure, we don't have health or education or corridors for communications or trans-border energy. It is not one thing that is driving the challenges that we have financially or fiscally; it is all the things. On budget day, this is my chance to give one more mini budget address, I suppose. We have to do all the things, and we have to make those choices. We're going to do it with evidence, and we're going to do it with evaluation. That's our way forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Kam Lake.

QUESTION 501-19(2):
ADDRESSING EMPLOYEE ISSUES AT NORTH
SLAVE CORRECTIONAL COMPLEX

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just have one last question for the Minister of Justice in regard to the employee assessment and the follow-up work that they're doing. I believe I'll steal some words from Minister Wawzonek where she said, "We have to get it right." I think this is one of those instances where we do have to get this right, and so I'd like to know what the Minister has set up and what his department has set up for people who work in corrections who don't feel like this is going well or feel like they need a voice or a path to be able to say to the Minister, "This is not going well. This is not being addressed." I'd like to know that that is happening in a safe space and in a confidential space. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. Minister of Justice.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think a feedback loop is the most important thing in terms of communication. We have to know what the people on the front line are thinking. That's where the expertise lies in the day-to-day operations, and if we don't have that, this is all for naught. This is going to fail. If someone feels like they are not being heard, they can talk to their supervisor. If that's where the problem is, you can talk to the union. If you still feel like you're not being heard, talk to the ADM. If that doesn't get you anywhere, talk to the deputy minister. This is actually what the deputy minister in the department has been saying since day one, since this initiative rolled out. That's

how serious they are about communication. Since when does a deputy minister tell front-line staff, "Call me if you have a problem," but that's what we're doing.

That's why I feel that, despite the Member's statement earlier where she tried to take the wind out of my sails, maybe, about the possibility of success, I do feel confident that we can be successful here because there is commitment right from the deputy minister all the way down. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much for that to the Minister. I appreciate that. I think that, sometimes, when you work on the front lines, it can be very intimidating to call up a deputy minister. I can assure the public that the deputy minister of Justice is very approachable, but I'd also like to encourage people to reach out to their MLAs. It's why they're here. If they feel like they can't approach a deputy minister, I really would like people in the corrections industry to not feel fearful about passing information through their MLAs, and we'll be sure to follow up with the Minister on the floor of the House.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. I'll take that as a comment. Colleagues, our time for oral questions has expired. Item 10, written questions. Item 11, returns to written questions. Item 12, replies to Commissioner's address. Item 13, petitions. Item 14, reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 15, reports of standing and special committees. Item 16, tabling of documents. Minister of Finance.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 286-19(2):
MAIN ESTIMATES 2021-2022

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: "Main Estimates 2021-2022." Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Tabling of documents. Minister of Infrastructure.

TABLED DOCUMENT 287-19(2):
FOLLOW-UP LETTER FOR ORAL QUESTION
254-19(2): TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

TABLED DOCUMENT 288-19(2):
FOLLOW-UP LETTER FOR ORAL QUESTION
278-19(2): MARINE TRANSPORTATION
SERVICES

TABLED DOCUMENT 289-19(2):
FOLLOW-UP LETTER FOR ORAL QUESTION

282-19(2): MARINE TRANSPORTATION SERVICES DOUBLE-HULLED BARGES

TABLED DOCUMENT 290-19(2):
FOLLOW-UP LETTER FOR ORAL QUESTION
298-19(2): EDZO HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE
CAMP

TABLED DOCUMENT 291-19(2):
FOLLOW-UP LETTER FOR ORAL QUESTION
335-19(2): DEMPSTER HIGHWAY

TABLED DOCUMENT 292-19(2):
FOLLOW-UP LETTER FOR ORAL QUESTION
336-19(2): TLICHO ALL-SEASON ACCESS ROAD
PROJECT

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I felt left out yesterday, so today, I'm going to table six documents: "Follow-up Letter for Oral Question 254-19(2): Transportation Safety;" "Follow-up Letter for Oral Question 278-19(2): Marine Transportation Services;" "Follow-up Letter for Oral Question 282-19(2): Marine Transportation Services Double-hulled Barges;" "Follow-up Letter for Oral Question 298-19(2): Edzo Highway Maintenance Camp;" "Follow-up Letter for Oral Question 335-19(2): Dempster Highway;" and "Follow-up Letter for Oral Question 336-19(2): Tlicho All-Season Access Road Project." Quyanainni, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Tabling of documents. Item 17, notices of motion. Item 18, motions. Item 19, notices of motion for the first reading of bills. Item 20, first reading of bills. Item 19, second reading of bills. Item 20, consideration in committee of the whole of bills and other matters: Minister's Statement 77-19(2), National Housing Co-Investment Fund; Tabled Document 165-19(2), Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 1-19(2), Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery, Recommendations to the GNWT; Tabled Document 166-19(2), Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 2-19(2), Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery, Recommendations to the GNWT; Tabled Document 167-19(2), Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 3-19(2), Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery, Recommendations to the GNWT, with the Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): I call Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of committee? Mr. Norn.

MR. NORN: Marsi cho, Madam Chair. I move that the chair rise and report progress.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): All right. There is a motion on the floor to rise and report progress. The motion is in order and non-debatable. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress.

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. SPEAKER: May I have the report of the Committee of the Whole, please, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes.

MS. SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Minister's Statement 77-19(2), National Housing Co-Investment Fund; Tabled Document 165-19(2), Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 1-19(2), Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery, Recommendations to the GNWT; Tabled Document 166-19(2), Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 2-19(2), Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery, Recommendations to the GNWT; Tabled Document 167-19(2), Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 3-19(2), Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery, Recommendations to the GNWT, and would like to report progress, and, Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Do we have a seconder? Member for Inuvik Boot Lake. All those in favour? All those opposed? Any abstentions? The motion is carried.

---Carried

Item 22, third reading of bills. Mr. Clerk, orders of the day.

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Mercer): Orders of the day for Friday, February 5, 2021, at 10:00 a.m.:

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

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6. Replies to Budget Address (Day 2 of 7) ---ADJOURNMENT
7. Acknowledgements The House adjourned at 4:47 p.m.
8. Oral Questions
9. Written Questions
10. Returns to Written Questions
11. Replies to Commissioner's Address
12. Petitions
13. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
14. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
15. Tabling of Documents
16. Notices of Motion
17. Motions
- Motion 26-19(2), Appointment of Languages Commissioner
18. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
19. First Reading of Bills
20. Second Reading of Bills
21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
- Minister's Statement 77-19(2), National Housing Co-Investment Fund
 - Tabled Document 165-19(2), Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 1-19(2): Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery - Recommendations to the GNWT
 - Tabled Document 166-19(2), Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 2-19(2): Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery - Recommendations to the GNWT
 - Tabled Document 167-19(2), Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 3-19(2): Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery - Recommendations to the GNWT
22. Report of Committee of the Whole
23. Third Reading of Bills
24. Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Friday, February 5, 2021, at 10:00 a.m.

