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The Honourable Frederick Blake Jr, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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(Monfwi)

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(Thebacha)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRAYER	1799
MINISTERS' STATEMENTS	1799
106-19(2) – Indigenous Language Month 2021 (R.J. Simpson).....	1799
MEMBERS' STATEMENTS	1800
Cell Phone Service between Hay River and Fort Smith (Martselos)	1800
Online Patient Portal (Johnson).....	1800
Conflict of Interest for Government of the Northwest Territories Employees (Bonnetrouge).....	1800
Importance of Roads in the Northwest Territories (Nokleby)	1801
Northwest Territories Heritage Fund (O'Reilly)	1802
Front-Line Workers and Responders (Norn).....	1802
COVID-19 Impact on Nunakput Teachers (Jacobson)	1802
Integrated Service Delivery Model (Cleveland).....	1803
Vehicle Safety on Highway No. 3 (Lafferty)	1803
Eulogy for Charles Edward Lennie (Semmler).....	1804
Eulogy for Morris Daniel Lafferty (Thompson)	1805
REPLIES TO BUDGET ADDRESS	1805
ORAL QUESTIONS	1808
WRITTEN QUESTIONS	1818
TABLING OF DOCUMENTS	1819
CONSIDERATION IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE OF BILLS AND OTHER MATTERS	1819
REPORT OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE	1840
ORDERS OF THE DAY	1841

YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Monday, February 8, 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 1:32 p.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Frederick Blake Jr.): Ministers' statements. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 106-19(2):
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE MONTH 2021

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, the Northwest Territories is home to a diverse group of people who live in a vibrant landscape shaped by rich culture and heritage. Our nine official Indigenous languages and our cultures bear sacred values and traditional knowledge that have been passed on through generations, shaping our identity and defining what makes the North truly unique. As leaders and residents of the Northwest Territories, we share the responsibility of revitalizing our Indigenous languages through celebration and practice to preserve our traditional ways of life. As Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, I would like to wish all Members of this Legislative Assembly and the residents of the Northwest Territories a happy Indigenous Languages Month. This month is an opportunity for residents to honour the rich culture and heritage embodied by the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Territories and our nine official Indigenous languages.

The theme for Indigenous Languages Month 2021 is Cook With Me, which supports the mandate of this government to increase food security and is inspired by the United Nations' International Year of Fruits and Vegetables in 2021. This unique theme was cooked up in partnership with the NWT Literacy Council and embodies messages of warmth, home, family, and cooperation. Food and cooking are at the heart of our traditions, memories, identities, and togetherness. Food brings people from different cultures together, allowing us to learn about one another's backgrounds. We share our cultural heritage when we share food with others. Saying "cook with me" to our families and friends is

an invitation to strengthen our togetherness, traditions, and customs.

Mr. Speaker, throughout February we encourage Northwest Territories residents to engage in the exciting activities and resources that have been organized for Indigenous Languages Month. In partnership with the NWT Literacy Council, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has prepared a number of initiatives. You will see a social media campaign featured on the NWT Indigenous Languages and Education Facebook page that will support the theme, Cook With Me. In addition, a regional recipe book featuring recipes from individuals and families across all the regions of the Northwest Territories has been translated into all official Indigenous languages and will be made available over the course of the month on the ECE website and social media. This week, you can view recipes in Tlicho and North Slavey on our Facebook page. Lastly, digital Indigenous language Valentine's Day cards will be available for sharing with friends and loved ones.

This month, we are also offering regional Indigenous governments celebratory grants to produce videos and other creative projects that promote, celebrate, and engage in Indigenous Languages Month. We have also engaged with schools across the territory to encourage them to celebrate by creating food-themed lesson plans that are linked to the Our Languages curriculum by using Indigenized approaches to culinary arts classes and by organizing celebrations of traditional foods in schools. Promoting food-preparation-themed language education supports the Our Languages curriculum and provides the opportunity to learn Indigenous languages and culture while also promoting food security for youth.

Mr. Speaker, it fills me with pride to live in and represent our territory, which has an abundant living history full of vibrant culture. Mahsi cho to the elders, community leaders, language advocates, and teachers who continue to promote Indigenous language revitalization efforts across the Northwest Territories. I encourage all Northerners to advocate for Indigenous languages and join me in celebrating Indigenous Languages Month. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Ministers' statements. Item 3, Members' statements. Member for Thebacha.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON CELL PHONE SERVICE BETWEEN HAY RIVER AND FORT SMITH

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Highway No. 5 is the road between Fort Smith and Hay River, and it spans 273 kilometres. It was constructed in 1966 as a gravel road, but it is now a fully paved highway that passes through Wood Buffalo National Park. Missing from this highway, though, Mr. Speaker, is a cellular service along the entirety of the road. This is a long stretch of road to have no cellular service. I would like to enhance my colleague's request to build cellular infrastructure along Highway No. 3, servicing Behchoko to Yellowknife, and include with it a cellular service along Highway No. 5. This is a much-needed infrastructure that needs to be built in order to increase the level of safety for all travellers who use Highway No. 5. In the event of an emergency, unless travellers have a satellite phone, they are obliged to depend on other bypassers along the highway to get any rescue assistance. Again, this is a 273-kilometre highway.

Mr. Speaker, this is not okay and is not acceptable. In this day and age, I think we have reached a point where this is considered critical infrastructure, and building it ought to be a no-brainer. It's a busy highway, and it is the only highway in and out of Fort Smith. It is also the NWT's entryway into Wood Buffalo National Park, which is the second-largest park in the world, making it a great tourist destination. A project like this would serve twofold. It would both enhance our highway safety and help increase the prospects of tourism in the South Slave region of the NWT. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, if the government is planning to enter into any new service contracts to install cellular service along any NWT highway, I would like to request that Highway No. 5 be considered in any future negotiations. I will have questions for the Minister of Finance at the appropriate time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ONLINE PATIENT PORTAL

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In November, I passed a motion in this House asking the Northwest Territories health system to stop using fax machines to send health records. This is from a 2018 report where the Chief Information and

Privacy Commissioner asked the same thing. There have been numerous breaches over the years, including some egregious ones such as health records being sent to CBC North in 2010 and 2012.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that the Minister in the reply can finally put an end to us sending health records. However, Mr. Speaker, there is a lot more to do in the area of electronic medical records. Specifically, I would like to see an online patient portal. In fact, our electronic medical records system was initially set up with one, but the department never turned it on due to privacy concerns, an ironic answer considering their consistent breaches of health information.

Mr. Speaker, in BC, a patient can log on and they can see their x-rays, they can see their MRIs, they can see status of the lab tests, they can see status of all their reports, including doctors' notes about their medical history. This allows patients to own their information and know when something is missing. In Alberta, which uses a very similar system to ours and which is our number one sharing-of-information jurisdiction, you can log in and you can see the status of any COVID tests. It has been crucial to their pandemic response, having people see where their lab tests are. I have had numerous concerns from constituents who are one week out from a COVID test, wondering where it is. They simply could have logged on to a patient portal, in Alberta, and seen that information.

Mr. Speaker, I understand there was work being done to upgrade our electronic medical records; I understand there is work being done to end the use of fax machines, but this work is long overdue. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services when this work will be completed and when we can let patients truly see all their health records so that we can put an end to the faxing, the CDs, the USBs, and the numerous ways we try to share our health information with our Alberta that leaves patients' files often incomplete and in a confused state of disarray. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Members' statement. Member for Deh Cho.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON CONFLICT OF INTEREST FOR GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES EMPLOYEES

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Today, I will speak on an all-important matter regarding conflict of interests in respect to GNWT employees. As employees of the Government of the Northwest Territories, everyone is held to high ethical standards in complying with the GNWT Code of Conduct and GNWT Code of Ethics. This is to

ensure that GNWT employees are maintaining public confidence and maintaining the integrity of the public service in the execution of their duties.

Mr. Speaker, one of the guidelines states that it is a condition of employment with the GNWT to respect the code of conduct in respect to the conflict of interests. It also states that employees who fail to comply with these standards may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Mr. Speaker, a conflict of interests exists where there is an actual or perceived situation between the employee's duties and responsibilities of office and the private interests of the employee or an immediate family member, which can include but not limited to pecuniary interests including investments and business involvements. Outside employment service, whether voluntary or otherwise on the board, council or committee or any other organization and personal relationships, including immediate family or spouse.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important that GNWT employees be held to highest ethical standards to ensure the integrity of the public service. There are many rumblings and hearsay that GNWT employees are allowed to do as they please without any discipline whatsoever. GNWT employees who may be in an actual or perceived conflict of interest are being protected by the GNWT itself. Mr. Speaker, that is not being impartial when the GNWT dictates who is or isn't in an actual or a perceived conflict of interest. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Deh Cho. Member's statements. Member for Great Slave.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON IMPORTANCE OF ROADS IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We always talk about how the North is such a unique place, and one thing that makes it so is our reliance on our winter road network. The allure and mystique of these multi-million-dollar annual ventures is so powerful it even spurred an entire television series, helping to put the NWT on the international stage. However exciting these roads are and how beautiful they are to drive, it must be pointed out that we spend millions of dollars every year building infrastructure that melts, not exactly a fiscally responsible situation.

The Mackenzie Valley Highway was completed to Fort Simpson in 1971 and the federal government, which was responsible for highway construction in the territories, promised the following year that it would continue up the east shore of the Mackenzie River and on to Inuvik. The highway would follow the natural route to the Beaufort Sea and provide

outside connections to Norman Wells. It seemed only a matter of time until the road would complete the Trans-Canada Highway system. However, that was not the case, and the NWT still awaits the connection of this vital infrastructure corridor.

In the North, we need roads for every facet of our lives. If permanent roads connected northern communities, supplies could be replenished year-round. An established, constant and steady supply chain would reduce the cost of living for our people. Additionally, with travel limited outside the territory for the foreseeable future, a connected all-weather road system would allow for residents to travel internally, taking territorial vacations that would help improve mental health while stimulating the economy. An often-overlooked aspect of having connected communities is that of personal safety. Will a person fleeing a domestic violent situation be more likely to leave if they can drive away? A tank of gas is much cheaper than purchasing an airline ticket.

Given the current state of our environment, both physically and economically, permanent roads in the North are now a necessity. Millions could be spent on the construction of the Mackenzie Highway through to the Beaufort-Delta, ensuring contractors, consultants, and construction service providers stay in business. It would bring in tourism, internal to start, while the international travel situation recovers. It would cut 800 kilometres off the trip from Edmonton to Inuvik, lowering freight costs because trucks would no longer have to go through the Yukon, all leading to a reduction in the cost of food and other essentials in remote communities. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to finish my statement. Thank you.

---Unanimous consent granted

MS. NOKLEBY: If I sound like a broken record, it's because I have often spoken about the need for all season roads. However, I do so again to urge my colleague, the Minister of Infrastructure, to go back to her federal tables and demand better for us; demand that we receive 100 percent funding to build our roads. They are literally the road to economic recovery for many northern businesses. Given the infrastructure deficit the federal government has left us in, the promised highway in the 1970s that never materialized, it is time we remind the Government of Canada that this was not our doing, and that it is an issue we can no longer afford to pay for at the expense of our people. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HERITAGE FUND

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Since its inception in 2012, the NWT Heritage Fund has grown to a very small amount of less than \$30 million. During that time, the value of our petroleum and mineral production was about \$18 billion. Of course, there were and continue to be benefits from resource development, but \$30 million is not a lot to pass along to future generations for this one-time natural capital. That is less than 0.2 percent of the value of these resources. The purpose of the Heritage Fund is set out in legislation. It is "to ensure that future generations of people of the Northwest Territories benefit from ongoing economic development, including the development of non-renewable resources." I am not convinced we are doing a very good at that. The problems with the fund are well-known and were identified even during the discussion paper back in 2010:

- There is no defined revenue stream for the Heritage Fund; and
- There is no public governance and minimal reporting.

The Heritage Fund is so neglected that the last annual report posted on the Finance website is for 2014. Although there is a legal requirement for the tabling of an annual report on the Heritage Fund in this House, the Assembly website only shows annual reports for 2013, 2014, and 2016. In the last Assembly, there was even a promise of a discussion paper to revitalize the Heritage Fund and its legislation. That promise, too, was never fulfilled.

The only changes that seem to have been made to the original legislation and regulations since 2012 were to loosen up the very conservative investment requirements set in the regulations. The change was apparently made because the Heritage Fund was actually losing money against inflation. The management of the Heritage Fund was also contracted out to a third party.

The one saving grace is that there is a legal requirement for a ten-year review that must report at the first sitting after August 1, 2022. We must begin preparing for that review now. The review must include:

- the operation of the act;
- how to obtain public input and advice on expenditures from the fund;
- independent oversight and management of the Heritage Fund; and
- any other amendments that should be made to

the act.

I will have questions for the Minister of Finance on improving intergenerational equity for residents of the Northwest Territories. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Members' statements. Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
FRONT-LINE WORKERS AND RESPONDERS

MR. NORN: Marsi cho, Mr. Speaker. Today, I want to speak a little bit about our front-line workers, and what I mean by front-line workers, our doctors, our nurses, our firefighters, corrections, people working at the borders, too many to list, social workers. I want to give out a good shout out to them today. I don't think we recognize them enough in the House, and the tough job that they have to do on a day-to-day basis.

They put themselves into harm's way. A lot of dangerous duties. Every shift, they go out there. They're putting themselves at risk. I just want to say: I can't say enough about them. I want to say a big marsi cho to them. When you go out there today, we're thinking about you. Again, I have been really thinking about this. It made me think about this on the way here when I drove to the Legislature this morning and saw the lights go on. I could imagine responding to calls in the very, very cold weather like this. You imagine fighting a fire in this cold weather. A lot of this is hard work. With that, I just want to say, a big marsi cho to all of those front-line workers. I am going to hit the desk for about five seconds just to show my appreciation.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Members' statements. Member for Nunakput.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
COVID-19 IMPACT ON NUNAKPUT TEACHERS

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking up on behalf of my teachers during this pandemic. In Nunakput, teachers provide a vital service, especially to our smaller communities, aside from parents, our kids' biggest resource for support. I have been talking to some of the teachers in Nunakput. They are really stressed out, and they need the government's help. Our teachers provide the essential services, but they're not being treated that way, Mr. Speaker. They are asking me why the nurses and doctors are considered essential service but they are not. I see where they are coming from, Mr. Speaker.

Teachers travel. They have to pay their own travel, their own hotel costs when they're going North for, say, spring break. Why is that? Why can't they do rapid testing? When they're in quarantine, they have to pay out of their own pocket, and they lose lost wages when they're COVID testing where we can get them back to the classroom more quickly, for the rapid testing, Mr. Speaker. We need our teachers more. Their job is hard and demanding, and even when there is no pandemic, it's still there. The stresses of work are there every day with them. I am hearing from the teachers who feel desperate but are afraid to speak out. I am here to speak out for them, Mr. Speaker. Today, I will have questions for the Minister of Health at the appropriate time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

MS. CLEVELAND: [Translation] It is the government's responsibility to ensure its program and services are accessible to the people it serves. [Translation ends]

The GNWT spends millions on programs and services, but they are not accessible to the people who need them, and people are falling through the cracks. 2020 was a challenging year. Yes, Northerners are resilient, but Northerners have been fighting the social challenges highlighted by 2020 for a long time.

For many, life feels like an exhausting game of snakes and ladders where every roll lands them farther down the game board. We live in a territory with the second-highest family violence rates, staggering rates of undiagnosed FASD, trauma in every community, rampant substance abuse, mental health challenges, and \$0.5 billion housing shortfall. When someone suffering through one of these challenges looks for support, the path needs to be clear. When someone is suffering through all of these, the path needs to be easy.

In November, I walked with an NWT resident trying to access supports. They agreed to share their journey, but I will call them "Avery" to protect their privacy. In short, Avery was a parent facing eviction from public housing, struggling with substance abuse and family violence in the home, both of which started during the COVID-19 lockdown. Avery's story is not unique and is relevant to all of our constituencies that we serve.

Avery's rock bottom brought us together. In the week that followed, they made 14 connections with public servants with the primary goal of accessing integrated case management and its wraparound

support services. Mr. Speaker, I know the GNWT system, refused to take no for an answer, and it still took us 14 connections to find support that extended beyond the first contact. If an MLA can't untangle the system, how can someone struggling be expected to? Avery's journey went from RCMP to specialty courts, NWT Housing, adult FASD clinic, mental health counsellor, adult social worker program, and ICM itself, all in an attempt to work through social challenges prevalent in the NWT, and ones that I would expect that the GNWT prepared to address. This siloed system of dead ends is failing our people. Accessing support should not feel like a rigged board game. We need to meet people where they are with the right support. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON VEHICLE SAFETY ON HIGHWAY NO. 3

MR. LAFFERTY: Masi, Mr. Speaker. [Translation] Today, I am going to talk about Highway No. 3. Today, as we all know, the winter road has opened to the mines. When we look at it, there are a lot of people travelling on Highway No. 3. All sorts of vehicles go through. At times, we know that there is danger, and yet, that's the way that we are living today. Right now, we have issues that have been brought a few times already. This is why I am bringing it up again. [Translation ends]

Many have been hurt driving the road. Many have been killed, Mr. Speaker. Most recently being Kelly Washie, a 45-year-old constituent of mine who died on New Year's Eve. Mr. Speaker, I heard firsthand what had happened on this very sad day from my father, who was driving Kelly Washie to Yellowknife for a grocery run, an in-and-out quick trip. It turned out to be a very tragic trip for all.

Mr. Speaker, on the way back from Yellowknife, Mr. Washie wanted to use a restroom, to which none were available on Highway No. 3, so they had to go outside in the back of the vehicle. When they parked on the side of the road with flashing lights, as soon as Mr. Washie went to the back of the vehicle, a few transport trucks drove by without slowing down, leaving a cloud of snow flying behind. Couldn't see anything.

Mr. Speaker, that was when Mr. Washie was struck by this semi-truck head on. Would it have made a difference or saved a life if this transport truck was going under the speed limit or slowed right down for a parked vehicle with flashing lights? Mr. Speaker, we'll never know the answer, but we must strive to make changes that could save lives on Highway No. 3. I will have questions for Infrastructure at the appropriate time, Mr. Speaker. Masi.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
EULOGY FOR CHARLES EDWARD LENNIE

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the family for the honour to read the eulogy for Charles Edward Inglangasuk Lennie, known to most as Edward Lennie, who passed away on November 6, 2020.

Edward Lennie was born at the Husky Lakes area on June 23, 1934. He is the youngest child of Sarah Kyikavikchick and Lennie Inglangasuk. His mother Sarah was a Gwich'in who came from a historical line of Gwich'in chiefs, and his father Lennie was a well-known leader amongst the Inuvialuit. Lennie was known as a Bankslander because of the numerous trips by schooner to Banks Island on the mainland.

Edward spent his first ten years of his life travelling by schooner and by dog team with his family all over the Beaufort coast, Arctic islands, and Mackenzie Delta. His family had camps at Napoyak in the Mackenzie Delta, Nulluk in the Husky Lakes area, Lennie River on Banks Island, and he spent his winters on Victoria Island north of Ulukhaktok.

In 1944, his mother passed away, and the following fall, he was put into residential school in Aklavik. He mentioned some hardships but mostly talked about the lifelong friends that he made from Fort Good Hope, Fort McPherson, Tuktoyaktuk, and the Beaufort-Delta. His father died a few years later, and at a young age, Edward lived with his older sister Winnie Cockney. He also stayed with his aunt Alice Simon and Old Simon at Nepoyuk.

Square dancing stories started when he was living with his sister Winnie. When word came through that there were square dances at the station, he would finish his chores early and run over to the dance no matter the weather. His cousins remember waltzing with him at the cabin to music over the radio. If you didn't know how to dance, he would let you stand on his feet to follow his lead.

Edward's passion for dancing showed effortlessly when he participated at local square dances in all of the communities. He loved to call out square dances, and he was proud to see the young men learning to call, too. Edward would dance all night long if people would let him.

One of Edward's first jobs was working on the Hudson Bay supply boat, and he continued to travel all over the Beaufort coast. In 1958, he married Jeannie, and they began their family. He moved his family and worked at numerous DEW line sites,

including Cape Parry, Stokes Point, Shingle Point, and Horton River.

In 1960, Edward moved his family to Inuvik, where he worked for the transient centre, and he continued to work for the Canadian Armed Forces, the federal government, and for Nortran, a branch of the oil industry, to recruit and train Northerners.

Inuvik was a modern town, so Edward made sure that his family lived a traditional lifestyle. He taught his family to burn wood for heat, haul ice for water, and use a dog team to check the snares down the river. He ensured that his family had always had time out on the land.

As Edward and Jeannie raised their children, they also provided a home for students who attended residential school. Edward enjoyed encouraging youth through northern games. They would spend hours playing these games in the living room that were always accompanied by the aroma of traditional foods that they would feast on at the end of the evening. Edward and Jeannie cared for a lot of young offenders who were placed in their home, as well, and showed them their way of life. Years later, the same boys would express their appreciation for the positive impact they made in their lives. Through his life, he promoted a sober lifestyle, teaching people that you did not need alcohol to enjoy yourself.

Edward worked hard at keeping his culture and history alive, and for this, he received many recognitions. In 2003, he was a recipient of the Indspire Award for Heritage and Sports, and they made the following statement: "When Edward Lennie heard that the Arctic Winter Games were to be held in Yellowknife in 1970, he was dismayed, 'How could they call something the Arctic Winter Games when there was nothing Arctic about them?' More than 30 years later, Mr. Lennie fixed all that. Northern games -- the one-foot kick, seal skinning, bannock making, and traditional dancing, to name only a few -- are alive and well in Canada's North. In 2000, the games that Mr. Lennie founded celebrated their 30th anniversary and are a vibrant part of the Arctic life. From Alaska to Labrador, they provide the Inuit with a critical cultural exchange and a chance to reconnect with an ancient past. Their components have also taken their rightful place in the Arctic Winter Games and are now demonstration sports in the Canada Games. He taught by example, and we are richer for it. An Inuit leader once said Mr. Lennie trained athletes himself, raised funds when necessary, and brought his beloved games and culture to a wider audience through performances for Royals, Prime Ministers, and the national television audiences. Needless to say, northern youth have kept up this elder's call. 'Wherever the Inuit came from, that is where it all started,' Mr. Lennie says in describing northern

games. 'All these sports fit into one life story. A guy that moves slowly does not have to be fast as long as he can think fast. The best way I can explain this is to keep playing the games.' And you can be sure the Inuit keep playing northern games for generations to come."

He was also the recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medallion in 2012, where he was presented this award in Inuvik on February 15, 2013, by the Deputy Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, Gerry Kisoun, and Robert C. McLeod, MLA for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Edward is greatly missed by many who experienced his warm smile and his smarty sense of humour. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family. Members' statements. Member for Nahendeh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON EULOGY FOR MORRIS DANIEL LAFFERTY

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Morris Daniel Lafferty was born on September 22, 1934, to James and Marguerite Lafferty. He was the fifth born of five sons and five sisters. He spent his life in Fort Simpson, attending school locally and completing up to grade 8. Morris wed his late wife, Susan, on December 17, 1965. Together, they had two daughters, Zina and Marcie, and their son Skylor, who was lost in early infancy. They raised Gloria as their own from the age of five months old and fostered many other children throughout their lives. Two weeks prior to the arrival of their firstborn, Morris had emergency brain surgery to remove an abscess that formed from an accidental hit on the head from an axe, as a child. The surgery left him paralyzed on his right side.

He was a musician, an artist, and a long-term supporter of the Metis nation and promoted the unique Metis culture and traditions. He served as the first president of the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, Morris started working at a young age, holding various positions throughout his life, buying his first fiddle from the Eaton's catalogue for \$45 as a young man. In 1958, while working for the Power Corporation, he was given the privilege of turning on the power for the first time in Inuvik. He had a wealth of information and was always willing to share it with others, including contributions to publications related to the history of the Metis of the North.

He will be remembered by those who knew him for his witty sense of humour and ability to tell stories for hours. He leaves behind his three daughters, 10

grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. The family would like to thank everyone for their kind words, thoughts, and prayers during this difficult time. As well, they would like to thank the long-term care staff in Fort Simpson for their continuous to support and the care they provided him. He will be sadly missed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Nahendeh. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family. Members' statements. Item 4, returns to oral questions. Item 5, recognition of visitors in the gallery. Item 6, replies to budget address. Member for Frame Lake.

Replies to Budget Address

MR. O'REILLY'S REPLY

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I encourage all my fellow Regular MLAs to use this opportunity to set forth their views on the budget, our fiscal situation, and how to translate our priorities and mandate into action through this second budget of the 19th Assembly. Of course, our priorities have changed with the pandemic, and while I encourage Cabinet to stay focused on that emergency, the mandate should not constrain what we need to do. We also cannot possibly achieve everything in the mandate, either. I will make some suggestions as to how to better focus our work going forward to ensure economic relief and recovery and to build long-term sustainability.

I will use my reply to the address to set out some thoughts on the following:

- a quick summary of the 2021-2022 budget;
- high-level observations on the process for the 2021-2022 budget;
- comments on the fiscal strategy;
- what is not in the 2021-2022 budget; and
- some concluding remarks.

Summary of the 2021-2022 Budget and Fiscal Context: the 2021-2022 budget is the largest ever for this government. There are no new cuts to programs and services to fund infrastructure. I am glad that there are no cuts compared to where we were four years ago with the previous Cabinet. There is only \$117 million, though, of increased spending or about 5.5 percent of the total budget. I agree and can support most of the new spending in this budget, including the following:

- increased costs of existing health services;
- increased capacity in Child and Family

Services;

- funding to participate in the National Housing Co-Investment Fund that the Regular MLAs fought hard to get added in;
- the final phases of the Child and Youth Care Counsellors program, including a travelling mental health team;
- increased funding for Income Assistance;
- some money towards the municipal funding gap;
- more funding for Northern Distance Learning;
- expansion of the dialysis unit in Hay River;
- increased funding for Indigenous language revitalization that the Regular MLAs pushed for;
- increased funding for daycare spaces
- more funding for long-term care services provided by AVENS;
- increased funding to emergency shelters;
- a renewed tourism strategy with Tourism 2025;
- funding to advance the knowledge economy;
- increased funding for the Sustainable Livelihoods Program;
- more funding for work on climate change; and
- the creation of a gender equity unit.

There are some spending items I cannot support, including increased funding to the NWT Petroleum Resources Strategy when there is no interest in exploration or development beyond possible production for local consumption.

I want to talk, Mr. Speaker, about the budget process. I can say that the relationship and negotiations with Cabinet over financial matters have generally been cordial and respectful, a much different and welcome change from the previous regime. With this budget, we had the benefit of the four-year business plans, although the links or changes could and should have been better documented and highlighted. In addition, it would have been very helpful to hold a meeting between the Minister of Finance and Regular MLAs to discuss priority areas for increased funding prior to development of this budget. That didn't happen, but I would encourage the Minister to do this next year.

Fiscal Context, while I appreciate the difficulty of trying to carry out prudent fiscal management

during a pandemic, we are facing a fiscal crisis, despite anything to the contrary from the finance Minister. We just had our debt limit increased to \$1.8 billion, and in this budget, we are already at \$1.59 billion. Operating surpluses, which are required for spending on capital projects or infrastructure, have crashed dramatically, from a predicted \$203 million to a deficit of \$31 million this year alone. Only \$68 million is predicted for 2021-2022. This drop is due to declining revenues and, in my view, overspending on capital projects initiated by the last Cabinet, which put roads over people. Unfortunately, we seem to be on the same path.

The Finance Minister promises creativity, innovation, and systematic evaluation of programs and services through the Government Renewal Initiative. While I support rigorous program evaluation, this will take time and extraordinary focus. It cannot make up the fiscal shortfall or make for a complete strategy moving forward. Put simply, we need more revenues to continue to provide the current level of programs and services, let alone the promises made in the mandate.

The untold story of the 2021-2022 budget is the catastrophic collapse of our own-source revenues, namely resource royalties and corporate taxes. I'll have questions for the Minister of Finance later today. Do we really expect to get nothing, zero, in terms of resource revenues from mining in the current year and only \$1.5 million in 2021-2022? It's predicted we will raise about \$28 million from alcohol and \$14.5 million from tobacco, but corporate taxes and mining royalties are going to be about \$2 million this year and even less next year, with negative corporate taxes.

Why does this government continue to promote mining if we don't get any direct revenues? This is a serious question that this government must come to terms with as part of its review of the fiscal regime for mining. In fact, there is no mention in the entire budget of any efforts to stabilize or increase any revenue sources. I am going to press the Minister of Finance to publicly release another version, hopefully with less anti-tax rhetoric, of the revenue options paper.

We need to start to have a public debate about options to raise revenues, such as an updated Territorial Formula Finance arrangement and keeping more, if not all, of our own-source revenues. A pandemic may not be a great time to introduce new taxes or increase taxes, but our current path is completely unsustainable. We need to have that debate. Some trumpet the reduction of the small business tax in terms of fairness and competitiveness. I've tried unsuccessfully now for five years to get Cabinet to seriously consider adding another personal income tax bracket in the same spirit of fairness and competitiveness. We're

one of the few jurisdictions left in Canada that only has four income tax brackets. Nova Scotia went to five in 2010. British Columbia and Ontario went to five in 2014. New Brunswick went to six in 2015. Newfoundland and Labrador went to five in 2015 as did Yukon. Alberta went to five in 2016. Even the federal government went to five in 2016.

The Finance Minister has said we have \$25 million in discretionary funds to work with to begin to make progress on the mandate over the next four years. The Finance Minister has never shared a costing of the mandate items, despite having been asked for that several times. What we do know, is that each of the large infrastructure projects, Taltson expansion, the Slave Geological Province Road, and the Mackenzie Valley Highway will cost a lot more than \$1 billion each. We have to stop fooling ourselves that these can be done at the same time. We simply cannot afford them all at the same time, even if the federal government gave us or other potential partners all of the money. There would be lots of costs in simply managing these projects. For example, we have seen with the Stanton Territorial Hospital with its ever-increasing operational costs, some of which are found in this budget for the first time.

What we do need, and I will continue to push for, is some realistic and detailed economic evaluations of the big three projects in comparison to other ways of investing these public funds. We need to look at the number of jobs created, the longevity and the location of those jobs, building of local capacity, how our labour force matches with the job opportunities, and other ways of more objectively examining value for money. If I had to choose between investing a billion dollars in the SGP Road or Taltson expansion and getting all of our housing out of core need for \$500 million or having 20 years of universal childcare, this would be a no-brainer. We would create more jobs, especially outside of Yellowknife, with an investment in housing and childcare and help our residents to better participate in our economy.

There is no funding for the large projects other than dribs and drabs provided by the feds for planning. There are no confirmed buyers or users in some cases and we cannot afford them. We need to make the tough decisions now about these three large infrastructure projects to stop us going over the fiscal cliff. We should focus on a phased approach for the Mackenzie Valley Highway to ensure we maximize local benefits, and we should drop the other two projects. That way, we can focus on people's immediate needs and build a more sustainable NWT.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to what is not in the 2021-2022 Budget. I recognize that this budget is status quo and that the mandate will require

additional funding, partly through supplementary appropriations. Perhaps, the greatest missing item in the budget is the absence of any new funding for a comprehensive economic relief and recovery plan. In fact, there is no plan other than what has been cobbled together almost exclusively using federal assistance. We need the plan and a clear identification of any funding needs or gaps particularly for small business support, an area that we have some control over. That plan needs to include further support for the service sector, tourism, agriculture, and, even better, food security and the performing arts. We must look at how we can transform our economy to better take advantage of our knowledge, the Polytechnic university, and environmental remediation. No plan and no money in this budget is not a good place to be at this point in terms of economic relief and recovery.

In terms of other items that should have been in the budget, I have been a persistent advocate for midwifery, having raised it 15 times in this House over more than five years. A territorial midwifery program has been in development for at least seven years and seems to be stalled now as there are no further funds for its implementation. As I understand it, COVID has again intervened as a competing priority. While I understand the fiscal cliff this government is facing, investment in completing a territorial midwifery program has long-term savings and preventative benefits. It makes sense to support mothers, babies, and families get the best possible start. I will have more to say about this when we review the Health and Social Services budget in Committee of the Whole.

The budget address was virtually devoid of any discussion of the commitment to and need for additional resources for completion of the ongoing Indigenous land rights negotiations and implementation of the agreements already in place. To assist with these efforts, our government also needs to seriously move forward with implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. If we are to achieve more than the one agreement-in-principle at one self-government table in the last Assembly, more resources and a fresh approach are needed. It's not clear whether new mandates and/or negotiators have been identified to carry forward this important work.

Barrenground caribou surveys are to be done this upcoming summer as the surveys were cancelled in 2020 due to COVID. However, ENR has no funding for 2021-2022 budget to carry out this work. It's not clear where the funding would come from other than internal cuts. This is how ENR funded its work on legislative initiatives in the last Assembly, and it had a devastating impact on its work and morale. We have made very little progress in taking any

concrete steps to save caribou and most of the herds are in a desperate state. The surveys are one of the key ways to determine the health of the herds and should be a funded activity.

There was no mention in the budget of the potential for benefits from the billion-dollar remediation of Giant Mine or the work required to reclaim the Norman Wells fields or other areas such as Cantung. The remediation economy is the equivalent of at least one of the big projects. It won't cost us anything as this is work to be done by the federal government or the private sector, but we have to work much harder to ensure Northerners will benefit. Of course, we must also put in place a proper post-devolution system to identify and manage environmental liabilities before they come back to this government and taxpayers. This is something the last Cabinet failed to do as we have seen with the Cantung mine, Cameron Hills, and the rollback of mandatory financial security in the Public Land Act. The Finance Minister must stop this bleeding now, working with her Cabinet colleagues and this side of the House.

There is little to no mention of the untapped potential of arts and culture to diversify the economy. This is another no-brainer, and there isn't even a whisper of it in the budget. Where is the promised Arts Strategy that should be used to help identify opportunities for investment and spur on economic recovery?

There are many other commitments from the mandate and elsewhere that will require our attention and investment, likely beyond the \$25 million that is available under the current fiscal strategy. This includes completing the network of the single-window service centres in all our communities. We need additional and redirected revenues for addictions that should be focused on aftercare and mental health support. Measures to fight poverty including in my wildest dreams, a guaranteed basic income program. That also needs to be addressed. I will be happy to work with my colleagues on this side of the House to push these priorities.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the decisions of the last Cabinet and the ongoing impacts of the COVID pandemic have clearly boxed us in, in terms of our fiscal situation and budgetary options. Previous cuts to programs and services to fund big infrastructure projects has pushed us closer than ever to the debt wall coupled with additional spending on COVID. This has resulted in more short-term borrowing and increased debt servicing cost. The infrastructure agenda from the last Cabinet continues to lead to increased O&M costs. It has generally failed to bring the anticipated benefits, whether it is the Mackenzie Valley fibre link that has not tied in communities, the failure to

stimulate tourism in Tuktoyaktuk, the lack of northern workers on the Tlicho All Season Road, or the deficiencies in the Stanton Territorial Hospital P3 arrangement.

I am pleased to see this Cabinet beginning to promote a more balanced approach to our mandate in this budget with no reductions. We need to spend more on our basic needs, whether that is housing, healthcare, or education, for the long-term outcomes our citizens deserve, and we need to raise the resources to do that. This means more revenues and a new fiscal arrangement with Ottawa. Now is the time to start to focus on building a more sustainable revenue base for the NWT.

I sincerely thank my Cabinet colleagues and their staff and my Committee colleagues for much hard work in getting us to this point. We still have more work ahead of us to ensure that the priorities of regular MLAs are more clearly reflected in the budget, but I am confident that working together we can reach a reasonable compromise and a better balance. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Replies to budget address. Item 7, acknowledgements. Item 8, oral questions. Member for Nunakput.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 512-19(2):
COVID-19 EFFECT ON TEACHERS BEING ABLE
TO TRAVEL

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, I brought up for the teachers not only in Nunakput but the whole Beaufort-Delta, and my questions will be, today, for the Minister of health. Does the Minister, working together to respond to COVID-19 and becoming aware of the teachers' situation, not able to travel and putting them on the rapid testing list and supporting them, if they go out for travel and having them covered under hotel accommodation for their pay, is she working with the Minister of ECE to get them on the rapid testing list? 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 want to start by saying how grateful I am to the 800 teachers in the Northwest Territories for the sacrifices they have made during the pandemic to switch to virtual instruction, to forgo holidays because of the isolation required. I realize it has not been easy. I have not heard from the NWTTA on the question of rapid testing. Our rapid testing capacity does exist in every community but in a fairly limited way, so that is something that I could

enquire about, whether there is any interest on behalf of the NWTTA in ramping up rapid testing for teachers.

MR. JACOBSON: Did the public health officer determine that, as doctors and nurses are essential workers, is it possible to put teachers on that essential workers list also?

HON. JULIE GREEN: The Chief Public Health Officer determined the occupational groups that are in priority on the vaccine list, and the teachers are not there. I have heard from NWTTA about that. The CPHO determined the priority based on risk exposure and risk of severe illness. Fortunately for us, schools have been very healthy places. They have obviously been very diligent with their isolation, with their hand-washing, with their cleaning and so on. Maybe they have done too good a job, but they have not been placed on the priority list at this time.

MR. JACOBSON: I am asking if the Minister of health could talk with her colleague the Minister of Education to put the teachers on that listing. I am bringing it forward because I am getting calls from my teachers in Nunakput who are too scared to speak up, thinking that they are going to have backlash. Is the Minister prepared to talk with her colleague to put the teachers on the essential workers list and get them rapid testing and able to cover their costs when they are travelling out during spring break, for instance? The teachers need support, just like we do our doctors and nurses, which they do such a good job. I've been worked on for the last few months, so the Inuvik hospital are awesome, thank you, but I need help from these Ministers to help my teachers, all the teachers.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Just to say again it's the Chief Public Health Officer whose decision this is, so it's not my decision and it's not the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. We do know that we are on track to vaccinate everyone in the Northwest Territories who is 18 years and older by the end of March. At that point, teachers will be in the same position as everyone else in terms of having protection, from the vaccine, but as I mentioned last week in response to questions, I do not think that our border controls will come off at the end of March because the vaccination rate in the rest of Canada is so much lower.

I do want to say that teachers have access to the Employee and Family Assistance Program through their union, the NWTTA. It's available to them 24/7, and of course, they are also eligible to receive any of the services that we offer to residents of the NWT through the NWT helpline, the Community Counselling Program, and similar things which I also spoke about at length last week.

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

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is it so hard to get commitment for getting essential worker status for the teachers? We need help. They need help. Like the Minister said, 800 teachers across the territory have done so much for the students and did their jobs well, but they are asking for help right now. They need to get out. It's been a year almost. Some of them have not been returned home. They need support to get them out for holidays and giving them a little bit of break during spring break. I am asking this Minister to talk to her colleague, to talk to the NWTTA, and get them on the list for rapid testing and support for them when they travel so they don't have to pay for their hotel when they come back into the territory. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: I just want to take the opportunity to say that, where the vaccine has been given in the small communities, every adult over 18 has received the vaccine. Of course, that includes teachers, so the teachers in the smallest communities have, in fact, been vaccinated. In terms of leaving the territory, nobody is a prisoner here. They are eligible to apply for a self-isolation plan for when they come home, isolate for 14 days. If it is non-essential travel, then they, like everyone else, will have to pay the cost of isolation, but if it is essential travel for family reasons or for medical reasons, then the government will pay their isolation costs. We do for them what we do for everyone else. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 513-19(2):
CELL SERVICE BETWEEN HAY RIVER AND
FORT SMITH

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Minister acknowledge and agree that Highway No. 5 should have continuous cell service installed along its entire 273 kilometres? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Finance is well aware that the territories, including the Northwest Territories, are certainly behind some of our other provincial colleagues, anyways, in Canada in terms of providing cellular coverage on highways. In being aware of that, we are beginning to take steps to find out what options there may be available, to explore what can be done to expand the coverage. The simple reality, Mr. Speaker, is there is no private

market for this. There is no way of earning any sort of revenue or profit on this. For this to go forward, there would have to be significant government support of the project, which takes certainly some consideration and planning. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MARTSELOS: Does the Minister agree that installing cell service along Highway No. 5 will help enhance the highway's safety and help grow the NWT economy?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Certainly, having cellular coverage over our highways would certainly improve safety. There is no question about that. I have not heard of the tourism aspect of it before today, so that is certainly an interesting aspect to have understood. We are taking steps, as I implied with my last answer. We are taking steps right now to have expressions of interest with respect to the highway through to Behchoko, between Behchoko and Yellowknife. It's my hope that, with that information, we will be able to look more broadly at other highways in the Northwest Territories.

MS. MARTSELOS: Will the Minister commit to including Highway No. 5 in any future contract negotiations for new cell service along highways in the NWT?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: As I said, there is right now an expression of interest open really to explore what options there might be, to see whether it's possible or how it would be possible to increase and improve cellular coverage on the highways in the Northwest Territories. Once we have that information in hand, I will certainly be sharing it with my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly, with a view to seeing, again, what we can do to improve coverage for all of the territorial highways. However, again, the first step is to get the information for that first stretch and to see what that can bring to us as some options.

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

MS. MARTSELOS: Mr. Speaker, will the Minister commit to installing cellular service along Highway No. 5 within the life of the 19th Assembly? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Would that it be so easy. I cannot make that commitment at this point. What I am going to commit to, again, is that we are going to get the information with respect to the stretch of highway between Behchoko and Yellowknife and to see what that costing might be, what those options might be. Once we have that in hand, we can start to look at other stretches of highway in the Northwest Territories. Again, it's not lost on me, the aspect of safety, and it's not lost on

me the costs or the fact that we are behind coverage compared to the rest of Canada. There is a lot of attention on this issue right now in terms of cellular coverage, not only here but elsewhere with the federal government, so it certainly is my hope that there may be some options for us. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 514-19(2):
CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND OUTSIDE
ACTIVITIES FOR GOVERNMENT OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES EMPLOYEES

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. My questions are in follow up to my Member's statement on conflicts of interest in GNWT employees with regards to outside activities. My questions will be directed to the Minister of human resources. Can the Minister provide the number of GNWT employees who were approved for an outside activity form? Mahsi.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that this number could well be into the hundreds. The requirement of having these forms is for any employee who is taking part in any outside activity. That could be anything as simple as volunteering as a sporting coach to having self-employment or to having some additional part-time employment, being on a board, et cetera. This is a good opportunity to make it clear that all employees should be filling out those forms, but it's really a number that is quite likely into the hundreds, if not beyond that, and it's done department by department. I have not had the opportunity here today to necessarily gather up the total number. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. BONNETROUGE: I can only imagine the vast number of outside activity forms that have been approved within each department, and there are many departments and many employees. Can the Minister provide a process each department has to perform prior to approving an outside activity form?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Again, this is something that comes out through each department, where any employee who wants to take on any kind of outside activity, employment, service, volunteer, anything of that sort, obviously needs to be outside of their regularly scheduled hours of duty, and they are expected to notify their deputy head in writing. Quite often, each department has their own form that they would fill out in order to examine and explore the nature of the activity. The point here is to avoid, certainly, conflicts of interest, but also the appearance of

conflicts of interest. That would then be approved either by the deputy or possibly delegated to a senior manager.

MR. BONNETROUGE: I am curious as to who approves the outside activity forms within each department and their qualifications as to which outside activity is actual or perceived. Can the Minister provide that information?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: This is another occasion where, although the Department of Finance, specifically within human resources, may give guidance on the matter, it does go down to each department. Each department does have their individual deputy minister specifically assigned to undertake the approval of these forms and then may well delegate that to senior managers.

Mr. Speaker, there does need to be some flexibility certainly. We would want to ensure that when there is an individual in a particular region making an application or making a request of this sort that the individual making the approval understands the nature of the activity at issue so that they can indeed assess whether or not there is any appearance of conflict.

Again, this is something that perhaps hasn't come up very often in the House. I think it's valuable to have this issue raised, because understanding the nature of conflicts and the appearance of conflicts is one that we certainly do take seriously. I do appreciate the questions, and I am confident that, as others may be listening, that deputies will be paying attention to ensure that they are following the process appropriately.

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

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the Minister for all those answers. They're very much appreciated. Can the Minister commit to reviewing all approved outside activity forms from GNWT employees and corroborating with listed outside agencies to ensure that there is no actual or perceived conflict of interest? I believe this may require the services of the Integrity Commissioner in looking at these. Mahsi.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: As I had said earlier, they may well be into the thousands, the number of forms. I am not going to be in a position myself, personally, to do this. The Integrity Commissioner, of course, monitors the activities of MLAs here within the House, but what I certainly can do is go back to the Department of Finance and speak to those in human resources and ensure that we are doing our best to communicate department by department and to individual regions in what it is

to understand the nature of a conflict, what it is to understand the appearance of conflict, and ensure that those materials are adequate, up-to-date, and regularly communicated so that those who are charged with making this decision and reviewing these forms have the best possible knowledge of how to do that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 515-19(2):
HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure. Can the Minister please outline the plan for the upcoming fiscal year with respect to highway projects and any plans for reconstruction efforts? What I would like to hear is: What is different about this upcoming year versus other years, and has there been an increase to budget for road works in the North? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Great Slave. Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I heard three questions in there, so I will try my best to get at least one of them. Several highway reconstruction/rehabilitation projects are planned for the upcoming fiscal year, such as work on Highway No. 1, Highway No. 3, Highway No. 4, Highway No. 7, and Highway No. 8. Tlicho highway construction is progressing, and it is on schedule for completion and opening by this November 2021. Two hundred kilometres of chipseal overlay has been planned for sections on Highways No. 3 and No. 6 and the Dettah Access Road, as well as the Rae Access Road.

No, there has not been an increase to the budget. The total budget for infrastructure for fiscal year 2020-2021 is \$169 million. I have got a list of some of the highway projects that I would be able to provide the Member with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. NOKLEBY: Yes, that would be great if the Minister could provide that. Can the Minister provide us with an update on the tendering for the Prohibition Creek Access Road, a project which is currently infusing \$15 million of federal infrastructure money into the Northwest Territories? Can the Minister outline how that project will lead to increased training and economic opportunity for Northwest Territories residents?

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: The department continues to advance development of the Prohibition Creek Access Road. It's a 13-kilometre all-weather road starting from at the end of Canyon Creek access road south of Norman Wells. Twenty million dollars

in funding has been secured under ICIP, the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, to be able to support this project. This is based on a 75-25 funding model between Canada and the GNWT. There are a few activities that need to be completed prior to construction, including some of environmental and geotechnical work that will inform the final design. Following this, a final decision on procurement contracting approach will be made. We hope that the construction on this project will be starting early 2022. We are excited to see the project move to the construction phase and having its economic benefits and training opportunities start to become a reality.

MS. NOKLEBY: I know I sound like a bit of a broken record, but I am always going to continue to bring up infrastructure and repeatedly ask the same questions. Can the Minister provide a timeline for the completion of the Great Bear River Bridge, including any unforeseen delays or difficulties due to the COVID situation?

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: There have been delays in scheduling some of the face-to-face public meeting in Tulita due to COVID-19. Engagement with groups and communities in the Sahtu, including a project update presentation, will resume when COVID travel restrictions are lifted, when we're able to do some video conferencing. The staff are working with the community to arrange for video conferencing that can reach as many participants as possible, so we have additional support as required from the community for land reserves, and the next community meeting should be able to assist us with that.

Prior to tendering work, the Department of Infrastructure will host an industry day far in advance of the construction tender in order to promote the integration of local, regional, northern businesses' opportunities on this project. Timing and logistics for this industry day will depend on the COVID-19 situation, which could be late 2021 or early 2022.

Mr. Speaker, the Member asked about the Great Bear River Bridge schedule. Right now, we have the project regulatory permits in place, and the projected timeline is March 2022, fiscal year 2022; tender and award construction contract for April to July of 2022; construction period, July 2022 to December 2025; bridge open to traffic, January 2026. Seasonal deficiencies and final demobilization will occur just shortly after.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am really excited to one day be able to drive across that bridge, as I have spent a lot of time in Tulita, so

I am pretty excited to hear that. My last question just has to do with funding. Will the Minister commit to pressing for 100 percent dollars for northern infrastructure funding, particularly for northern highways? Will she commit to being a thorn in the side of every FPT table that she is on to impress upon them the urgency for this money for the North? It must start now, not in years, or we will lose too many businesses in the meantime. Thank you.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: No pressure. I will do what I can. I do continue to engage with the federal Ministers assessing federal funding opportunities. I did raise the issue of 100 percent funding, particularly with the new construction of projects like the Mackenzie Valley Highway with Minister Omar Alghabra, the new federal Minister of transportation, so we had an introductory call on January 28th. He is aware of some of the issues, and I will continue to pressure some of my federal counterparts.

I do want to make it clear, however, that many of the federal funding pots have very defined cost-sharing guidelines that do not contemplate any 100 percent federal funding. At this point, I am not willing to risk 75 percent federal funding on important projects by submitting applications that do not meet some of the program criteria. The issue of 100 percent highway projects will remain a topic of discussion with the federal government and myself as Minister of Infrastructure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 516-19(2):
COVID-19 TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS FOR
TEACHERS IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of education. As to my colleague from Nunakput's concerns of teachers and travel, most of our teachers in the regional centres in our small communities are providing what I feel is an essential service to our children. What is the plan for approving travel this spring break, since it was such a hot topic during Christmas? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The plan for spring break is going to be very similar to the plan for Christmas. Thank you.

MS. SEMMLER: We know that the CPHO has said, when we question whether the vaccine is going to

loosen or take the border controls away, that she is not commenting that far. Has the department started consulting with the regional school boards or surveying if we will have a large amount of vacancies in September due to some of them not being able to travel for December and for their spring break? As we know, a lot of the teachers in our communities leave the summer and go back home to their families throughout Canada.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: COVID has really changed a lot of things, but there are few who have been upended as much as teachers and students. There are things like the tourist industry, but schools across the world have been feeling this. I understand and I appreciate the sacrifice that teachers are making because not everyone is from here. I'm lucky that my family is in the territory. I don't have to go outside of the territory to see them, but that's not the case for everyone. Most of our teachers are from outside of the territory. A lot of them are young, and this could be their first time really away from their family. It is a big sacrifice, and I appreciate that.

The territory always loses teachers. It's tough to get teachers here, and it's often difficult to keep them. It's a different way of life, especially if you're used to a big city. You come up, and you're living in small communities. It can be difficult, and the weather, a lot of different factors. We often lose teachers at Christmas. Sometimes teachers just don't come back after the Christmas break, and often teachers don't come back after a couple of years. We fully expect that there will be turnover, as there always is, and we don't have any hard numbers at this point about how many teachers will not be returning. I have heard anecdotally that teachers have said that they won't be, but I can't point to any statistics. However, I would assume that it might be a higher number than normal.

MS. SEMMLER: One of the questions that I have for the Minister is: Trying to plan for the future, we don't want to plan in August or in July or June. If we do have a low uptake of teachers who are coming into the territory or applying for jobs or recruiting because of all of our restrictions, say if our border restrictions are still in place, is there a possibility that we will get more e-learning or Northern Distance Learning-type classrooms for some of our kids that could potentially have a teacher but have the kids in the classroom and the teacher may be on the screen with some support?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: The last thing we want to do is move toward more distance learning. Our goal is to fully staff all the schools with all the teachers and have in-person instruction. We've been lucky, more so than the rest of Canada, more so than many places in the world, that we've been able to have so much face-to-face learning, and we want to keep

that going. Staffing has already started for the upcoming year, and so hopefully we're making these moves early so that we can attract more teachers. There is a lot of planning that has to be done. Everyone who is involved in education, the teachers' association, the school boards, are all aware that this is a concern. It has been brought to my attention, and I take it seriously. I have these discussions with the department, but our hope is that we are going to continue to be able to attract teachers to the territory.

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

QUESTION 517-19(2):
INCIDENTS INVOLVING TRANSPORT TRUCKS
ON HIGHWAY NO. 3

MR. LAFFERTY: Masi, Mr. Speaker. [Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About the main road that I mentioned earlier, we know there has been a lot of traffic and a lot of collisions. We have a few people passed on Highway No. 3, and so far, we had about six from our home community of Behchoko. [Translation ends] I would like to ask the Minister of Infrastructure: Would the Minister of Infrastructure please provide this House with a 10-year breakdown of the vehicle accidents on Highway No. 3 between Yellowknife, Behchoko, and Fort Providence which involve tractor-trailer units? The Minister may not have the information, but if detailed information could come forward, that would be very helpful. Masi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to start off by saying my thoughts and prayers are with the family for the highway tragedy that happened at the end of December. The department is aware and shares some of the Member's concerns about the safety of Highway No. 3, especially the section between Yellowknife and Behchoko, which the Member knows is the busiest highway in the Northwest Territories, for that stretch of the highway. Like the Member said, I may not have the numbers with me. I know the numbers of vehicle accidents along the highway are high.

I do want to say, though, that the number of vehicle collisions on Highway No. 3 between Yellowknife and Behchoko has declined 76 percent between 1999 and 2019, despite a 225-percent increase in traffic. If the department has the numbers, then we can provide that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. LAFFERTY: I would be one of those frequent travellers on Highway No. 3 because I represent Behchoko and the communities, and obviously, I

see a lot of semi tractor-trailers on the highway. Every time I am on the highway, there are big trucks on the highway. Speeding is the number one cause of these accidents, especially during the winter road season when it opens up, which is today, so there will be a lot of tractor-trailers on Highway No. 3. There will be very busy traffic, up to 6,000 loads, I believe, going up to the mine sites. These tractor-trailers don't slow down when there are vehicles parked on the side of the road with flashing lights. I do have a witness who was involved in this, as I spoke to in my Member's statement, first-hand, on December 31, 2020. My question for the Minister of Infrastructure: What are the protocols in place for these truck drivers when it comes to approaching a parked vehicle with flashing lights on the side of the road? How is it enforced?

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: I want to thank the Member for suggesting to look at speed limits for trucks and maybe even lower them. We will have to consult with the general public and the transportation industry and get their thoughts on this matter. It is a possibility that reduced speed limits could alleviate some of the tragedies and accidents along the highway. It will have to be a coordinated safety campaign that would make the highways safer. I can commit to having some of this work done and getting back to the Assembly.

MR. LAFFERTY: Just to elaborate a little bit more because I did speak to the Minister in advance because this is of high importance in my region: I am getting messages from my constituents asking if this government can lower the speed limit for these tractor-trailer units down to at least 70 kilometres per hour. Right now, as it stands, it's 90 kilometres per hour, and it's still not being obeyed or followed. What would be the process to make this happen? We had a public meeting in Behchoko on Highway No. 3 safety issues this previous Monday with all the stakeholders, and almost everyone raised this issue. My constituents would like to see this change ASAP. Can we see this in the life of this government?

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: The Member talked about a meeting in Behchoko that happened on February 1st, and there were representatives from governments, industry, and enforcement agencies, as discussed, to be able to make this Highway No. 3 safer for all motorists. I fully support that work going forward and agree with the need for increased cooperation at all levels and improving public safety education for professional drivers and for the general public who use Highway No. 3.

In the meantime, we are taking positive steps to make the Northwest Territories safer. For example, like all jurisdictions in Canada, we are in the process of developing and implementing a

mandatory entry-level training program for new Class 1 truck drivers, so we expect to have this work done and a program up and running by this December. We do have some concerns about truckers speeding on the section of the highway, and I can say I have witnessed it in person. The majority of the truck drivers do obey the speed limits, but there are always those who do not. We need to come up with some ways to be able to work with the communities and try and come up with ways to be able to have transport trucks reduce their speed.

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

MR. LAFFERTY: Masi, Mr. Speaker. I am glad the Minister is receptive to looking at reducing, possibly, the speed limit for these transport operators. Obviously, that would be a good start for this government. The safety of Highway No. 3 also should be and must be a priority, no matter who or what company they are working for. The posted speed limit should be obeyed at all times, especially for the tractor-trailer drivers, who we have seen so many times speeding. We are here to provide some options and ideas, so this is one of the recommendations that has been passed on to me: Could the Minister possibly look into establishing camera units at Fort Providence bridge crossing, where there are cameras already, one at Behchoko, and in Yellowknife to monitor to speed limits? A system where, once leaving the destination, let's say leaving Fort Providence and arriving in Yellowknife at a certain time, expected time of arrival is based on speed limit? Mr. Speaker, masi.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: I agree with the Member that we need to look at increasing highway enforcement patrols in the region, especially with the opening of the Tlicho All-Season Road that is going to happen in November. I will be, and the Member may be happy because we did have a discussion, perhaps looking at funding for additional highway patrol officers in the North Slave to be included in the next business plan. I think the Member would be happy to say that adding one additional person to be able to help monitor the highway is a good start, and I think that is something positive coming out from the department. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 518-19(2):
EHEALTH SYSTEM AND ONLINE PATIENT
PORTAL

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spoke earlier in my statement about our electronic medical

record system and our eHealth system. At one point, the Northwest Territories was a leader in this area, being one of the first jurisdictions to completely shift all of our health records to electronic form. When we designed that system, we designed a patient portal, which allowed people to log in and see their health records digitally. Other jurisdictions have now caught up and have those portals open and operating, and we have refused to do this. My question for the Minister of Health and Social Services is: Why has that portal not been turned on? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The department supports, in principle, the idea of having a patient portal where patients can access their health information that's held in electronic medical records, recognizing that there is information that is not in electronic medical records. We recognize the benefits of them having confidence in managing their health themselves and to make sure they're making informed discussions with their healthcare provider. It turns out that turning this feature on is a little less like turning on a light switch and more like steering the Queen Mary. It hasn't been accomplished at this point, and in the meantime, the medical record system we're using is going to be retired on December 31, 2023, so we are now looking for a new electronic medical record system. It seems unlikely we are going to make modifications to this system, but rather, we'll look at it in the context of the next system. Thank you.

MR. JOHNSON: I look forward to bringing up this issue in the next Assembly as it was brought up in the last, as well. I understand we are now shopping for a new electronic medical records system. I heard that was 2023. Can the Minister commit that as part of going out and purchasing a new system, an online patient portal will be part of that system?

HON. JULIE GREEN: I can't make that commitment. I can say that there is interest in this. I've already said that. It's in the four-year business plan that you've reviewed in the fall. Another possibility is to have a separate patient portal that is not connected to the electronic medical records but, in fact, include a wider range of records such as you mentioned in your statement: records from Alberta, paper records, images, and that kind of thing. Before we go down this road, we need to do a very comprehensive privacy assessment, and we need to answer some fundamental questions such as: Can parents access their children's records? If you are a caregiver, can you access your patient's records or your client's records? We need to have a very robust privacy and public engagement on this

issue before we are able to decide what the best route forward is.

MR. JOHNSON: I recognize that it may not be as simple as turning a switch on. However, our doctors and our healthcare professionals use HealthNet Viewer daily. There have been consistent problems in this area in making sure that patient files are complete. I think that there is a bit of a misunderstanding, and our patients think that someone is monitoring their file and making sure it is robust and complete and all of the data works in there. Actually, the health system is just as siloed as many other GNWT departments. My question is: What work is being done now to make sure we are bringing all of our information into one place, whether it is the electronic medical records system or some new system as the Minister states?

HON. JULIE GREEN: I will need to return to the Member with information about what is being done right now on bringing in different sources of information into electronic medical record. I can say that I've answered a couple of questions from MLAs about records that seem to be missing from the electronic medical records for one reason and another. If the Member has a constituent who feels that their electronic medical records are incomplete, we can certainly investigate that.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have had multiple constituent issues of records missing, but the problem is: they do not have access to that electronic medical record system. A portal accomplishes exactly that, is that they can keep a file up-to-date. As the Minister said, there is lots of work to do in this area. COVID, I think, has pushed this work to the forefront. Is there a digital health strategy coming forward with some of the lessons learned and some of the paths we have to go down that will answer these questions such as maybe by 2023, whether we will have this portal? My question to the Minister is: do we have a comprehensive digital health strategy that is factored in, the changes COVID has put on the system? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: The Department of Health and Social Services is very actively working on the pandemic rather than looking back at all of the lessons learned. I am not aware that there is work being done on a digital strategy at this point. Of course, it is important to capture the lessons learned, but this is not the moment. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 519-19(2):

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HERITAGE FUND

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Finance. In my statement, I described the legal requirement for tabling of an annual report for the Heritage Fund in this House. Can the Minister explain why this legal requirement has not been fulfilled for several years and whether she will immediately bring the reporting up to date? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that, when the Heritage Fund Act was initially put into place, it actually did not include a requirement for the report to be tabled or provided. However, when the act was amended and with a new Financial Administration Act in force, and I believe that would have been in 2016, from that date forward, the reports have, in fact, been published and brought forward by the Department of Finance and that indeed those reports are contained in section 3 of the public accounts, which does get tabled every year, and that 2018-2019, 2017-2018, and back to 2016-2017, all three of those public accounts, including section 3, including the report detailing the financial administration of the heritage fund, are available online through the Department of Finance website. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. It would be much more helpful, in my view, if these could be tabled separately somehow in the House so people could actually know that they are publicly available. Having them buried in public accounts is not very transparent. However, the purpose of the Heritage Fund was "to ensure that future generations of people of the Northwest Territories benefit from ongoing resource development, including the development of non-renewable resources." With less than \$30 million after almost 10 years and on resources worth over \$18 billion, clearly, we have collectively failed. What is the Minister going to do to try to turn around the NWT Heritage Fund so that there is actually something worthwhile for future generations?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: The value of the resources that are going out from the Northwest Territories, perhaps some of the challenges that we are facing right now, is that we are not necessarily speaking about the same thing. The royalties that are calculated, Mr. Speaker, come from the profits, and so the mines that have to generate profits, that have these resources, have to pay their staff, have to pay salaries, have to pay taxes, a variety of taxes, and have to pay royalties, as well, and, of course, have to pay for the capital to build the

mines that actually then can generate the profits to take the resources out of the ground. It's not quite so simple as to simply say, "How much is it worth?" It is, "What money is actually available after, with the profits, to put back in?"

With that, Mr. Speaker, the Heritage Fund, I can certainly say, compared to a year ago when there certainly were tremendous shocks, the fund is actually up 15 percent since the lows back on March 31 of 2020 and that, in fact, the management of the fund is such that we are now seeing increases as markets are starting to turn around.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that report on the health of the fund, but she did not really answer my question about why there is going to be so little to pass on to future generations. The problems with the fund started with the very low rates at which we capture revenues from resource development. There is no legally set revenue stream for the heritage fund and no public governance. As we approach the 10-year mandatory review, what is the Minister going to propose to ensure that we capture and retain a fair share of resource revenues for future generations?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: The 10-year review, in fact, it is the Legislative Assembly or a committee of the Legislative Assembly that is responsible for conducting the 10-year review. I can certainly assure the Member, assure this House, that myself and the Department of Finance are more than happy and very much prepared to be of assistance as that process goes forward through this Assembly.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. She really did not answer my question about how to increase the money going into the Heritage Fund, so I guess I will try it again. As we approach the 10-year mandatory review, what is the Minister going to propose to ensure that we capture and retain a fair share of resource revenues for future generations? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: There is currently a resource-royalties review underway. There is, of course, the Mineral Resources Act regulatory scheme that is being reviewed and looked at to bring the Mineral Resources Act into place. To the extent that there is some concern about the way that the fund gets managed, which is detailed quite extensively in the regulations surrounding the heritage act, then, at that point, again the Department of Finance is more than happy to assist a committee of the Assembly which is charged, in fact, with the review that is supposed to happen in

the 10-year plan. I am looking forward to that process and to all these processes and to continuing to be available to support the Assembly when that review takes place and to continue to update the Assembly with respect to the Mineral Resources Act as it evolves and to the royalty review that is included therein. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 520-19(2):
CLIENT-FOCUSED INTEGRATED SERVICE
DELIVERY MODEL

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I spoke earlier about the challenges that an NWT resident had in accessing programs and services through the GNWT. Two-and-a-half minutes definitely was not enough time to go through the detailed challenges and frustrating challenges that this person faced in order to get some access and in order to get some resolution to some of their challenges. My point is, Mr. Speaker, that our programs and services, we spend millions and millions of dollars making programs and services available within the GNWT, but they are definitely not accessible to NWT residents. I would like to find out from the Premier today: does this government intend to address the NWT's need for client-focused accessible integrated service delivery in the course of this Assembly? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. Honourable Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a concern. I know, from my own history of being a social worker, that there are issues to the government. All government programs are meant to provide services to the people based on the needs of people. Because the government is so big sometimes, they do actually end up working in silos. Over the years, we have tried many things to address this issue. We have multiple working groups. We have committees of Cabinet where members from different departments sit together. We are looking at an integrated case management service with the Department of Justice. Within our smaller communities, we have government service officers. Is it the answer? It's the start of the answer, Mr. Speaker, but we have a long way to go. I would be the first to recognize that we are trying, but yes, open to any suggestions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. CLEVELAND: Can the Premier give us an idea of what direction has been given to departments to enable and empower front-line staff to work together?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: There has been no direction that I know of that has said all government departments shall work together to the front-line service workers, but we have given that expectation to deputy ministers across. That's why we have deputy ministers' working committees, as well. Does it get down to the front-line person? That's a concern. People have job descriptions, and I know that most government workers do really care, and they do go above and beyond. It's not in the job descriptions, but I do hope that, when people see obstacles, for example, if they're looking at income support and there's an education issue, that they would actually try to reach out. That is the work. We recognize that there is an issue, but that is the work. That's why we are doing the integrated case management pilot, and it's showing success. No-brainer that it's showing success, so we are hoping to expand that program as we move forward. Again, lots of competing priorities, though.

MS. CLEVELAND: I appreciate that people have job descriptions, and I will say that every single person that we came across fulfilled their job description. They fulfilled the mandate of their department. That's what they intended to do and what they are supposed to do. People aren't boxes, and they don't fit into boxes. People's challenges in life extend beyond one single box of one mandate in one department. When somebody presents with a challenge with housing, it quite often is not simply a matter of a housing issue. When somebody presents with a challenge of income security, it is not solely a challenge of filling a bank account. There are so many other pieces that go with that. Until we start helping people with wraparound supports that address their concerns, we are never going to end up spending less money. We are never going to catch up.

My question would be: if no direction specifically has been given -- I recognize what the Premier says about the integrated case management. They have a huge wait list, and I am going to talk about that tomorrow with the Minister of Justice. They can't serve all of our clients. Is the Premier willing to give direction to Cabinet to start making front-line staff work together?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I will give direction to the Ministers during the Cabinet meeting. I can make a commitment to do that, that they should talk to their senior officials in every department and do try to talk about client services and how we can best work with people. I do think that all Ministers recognize that. I know that they're trying to do that. We're open to ideas, like I said. The combining of one release of information form that was brought from this Assembly from Regular Members, give credit where credit is due, was a phenomenal thing, in my opinion.

We have work to do. The integrated case management program is a success. That was a no-brainer for me. I knew that would happen. The government service officers in every small community, those have huge successes. We have work to do, but I will give direction, as the Member asked, to every Minister that we see here today, hearing me now, talk to their officials, ask their officials that, as much as possible, have people work together. However, in saying that, I do have to recognize that there is confidentiality, especially in, for example, health or even housing. Do I want my story shared with everybody without my consent? Absolutely not, but we could work better together as much as possible.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do have some suggestions for different Ministers for later this week that I will work through with them as the week goes on. I will say that, without the policy and the process in each department, in order to essentially force it, it's not going to happen. Unless each department sets up policies and processes that give them cross-reference to be able to talk together and empowers their public servants to work together, it's just not going to happen. It's not just a matter of saying to people, "Talk to one another," because their job descriptions and their protocols within their departments don't allow them to do that.

One of the things that I noticed over and over again was that different service providers were met with dead ends. They were there to listen to you about what it had to do with the mandate of their department, but they weren't empowered to be able to say, "Listen. That sounds like an issue for income security. Let's bring income security into the room." It was a matter of sending somebody to walk six blocks to see if they could find the right public servant to talk to and not putting the onus on the person who has a place to sleep that night to bring the person into the room. That's what needs to change. I do believe that our public servants are amazing, and they do want to make change, but they need to be empowered to bring their colleagues into the room. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: There is no arguing with the Member. She is absolutely right. It would be really nice if people could stop and hit one service centre and be able to get their answers addressed and the services they need and to actually not have to walk to the next government office two blocks or five blocks away, whatever it may be, that they could pick up the phone. That is the goal of the government, eventually.

Giving credit in the last Assembly when they started the integrated case management program, that was the goal, that it would become a pilot project, and from that work, which we're just concluding, we just did an evaluation, I believe, a while ago, and again, showed success. That work would actually be transferred and that we can actually get more and more departments to be doing that work. It is part of the answer. It's not the only answer.

I didn't like one-stop shopping because I heard from too many people that when you have one-stop shopping, if I get mad at that worker and that worker is mad at me, I have nowhere to go; but I think that there is a combination that's needed, Mr. Speaker. It's not just a one-stop shopping. Maybe it's an option that you can have a one-stop shopping service officer, somewhere to go, but also give people the options that, if I don't want to go there, I can still go to income support or housing on my own so that I can access those services.

I think that we need to look at all of the options that are available, Mr. Speaker. We have to make sure that our services are people-centred. People-centred sometimes does not mean there's only one right answer; it means having a combination of answers for people that meet their needs. I think that is the work that we are doing now, and we will continue to. We are more than open to suggestions on this issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, honourable Premier. Colleagues, our time for oral questions has expired. Item 9, written questions. Member for Frame Lake.

Written Questions

WRITTEN QUESTION 22-19(2): FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS FOR THE EKATI MINE TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Finance: Please provide a list and amounts of all financial obligations to the Government of the Northwest Territories for the Ekati Mine at the time the property was sold to Arctic Canadian Diamond Company Ltd., including the following:

1. An itemized listing of all outstanding amounts due to the Government of the Northwest Territories for payroll taxes, property taxes, corporate taxes, mining royalties, carbon taxes, fuel taxes, land lease rents, water use fees, Worker's Safety and Compensation Commission assessments, and any other financial obligations; and
2. Details on how each of the financial obligations listed above were treated during the sale; and

3. Whether GNWT has forgiven or changed the terms of payment for any of the above financial obligations; and
4. The aggregate amount spent by GNWT in connection with the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act proceeding in relation to the Dominion Diamond group of companies including outside legal counsel, consultants, staff time, and related costs.

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Written questions. Item 10, returns to written questions. Item 11, replies to Commissioner's address. Item 12, petitions. Item 13, reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 14, reports of standing and special committees. Item 15, tabling of documents. Minister of Finance.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 296-19(2):
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS 2019-2020, SECTIONS I, II,
III AND IV

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: "Public Accounts 2019-2020, Sections I, II, III and IV." Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Tabling of documents. Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission.

TABLED DOCUMENT 297-19(2):
WORKERS' SAFETY AND COMPENSATION
COMMISSION NORTHWEST TERRITORIES AND
NUNAVUT CORPORATE PLAN 2021

TABLED DOCUMENT 298-19(2):
WORKERS' ADVISOR OFFICE OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES AND NUNAVUT
2020 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the following two documents: "Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission Northwest Territories and Nunavut Corporate Plan 2021;" and "Workers' Advisor Office of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut 2020 Annual Report." Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Tabling of documents. Item 16, notices of motion. Item 17, motions. Item 18, notices of motion for the first reading of bills. Item 19, first reading of bills. Item 20, second reading of bills. Item 21, consideration in committee of the whole of bills and other matters: 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 Tabled Document 286-19(2), Main Estimates 2021-2022; 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 now the Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of committee? Mr. Norn.

MR. NORN: Marsi cho, Madam Chair. Committee wishes to review Tabled Document 286-19(2): Main Estimates 2021-2022, for the Department of Finance. Marsi cho.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, committee. We will take a short recess and resume.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): I call committee back to order. Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 286-19(2), Main Estimates 2021-2022. The committee has agreed to forego general comments on the tabled document but will make comments on each department. The committee has agreed to begin with the Department of Finance. Does the Minister of Finance have any opening remarks?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. I am pleased to present the 2021-2022 Main Estimates for the Department of Finance. Overall, the department's estimates propose an increase of \$15.2 million or 5.3 percent over the main estimates of 2020-2021. These estimates support the mandate objectives for the Department of Finance while continuing to meet the GNWT's fiscal objectives to prioritize responsible and strategic spending. Highlights of these proposed estimates include:

- \$76.8 million in contribution funding to the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation; and

- \$8.4 million to increase Carbon Tax Offset rebates provided to NWT residents and businesses to offset the impact of increasing the Carbon Tax to \$40 per tonne of greenhouse gas emissions on July 1, 2021.

The department's 2021-2022 Main Estimates reflect the transfer of procurement shared services from the Department of Infrastructure to the Department of Finance. These estimates continue to support the priorities of the 19th Legislative Assembly by:

- ensuring government procurement maximizes benefits to residents and businesses by supporting the GNWT's ongoing procurement review;
- streamlining the financial processing for all GNWT departments and the NWT Health and Social Services authorities;
- supporting and managing the GNWT's information security and technology resources; and
- ensuring that GNWT departments have the support they need to manage their human and financial resources appropriately.

That concludes my opening remarks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Do you wish to bring witnesses into the House?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Yes, please, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses into the Chamber. Would the Minister please introduce her witnesses?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am pleased to introduce Sandy Kalgutkar, deputy minister of Finance and secretary to the Financial Management Board, and also Rick Wind, chief information officer.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, and welcome. We will now proceed with a review of the borrowing plan, and then we will go into departmental finance. The committee has agreed to forego general comments and will proceed with the detail contained in the tabled document. Committee, please turn to the borrowing plan on the second tab. Does committee have questions? It's the second tab at the beginning of your binder. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I see that we are adding quite a bit of debt this year once

again. Can I just get current projections of when we are expected to hit our debt ceiling? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. That's not reflected in the document. That is included in the main estimates. I believe the year that we are looking at right now would be in 2023-2024 as a projection. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Did you want your staff to add anything?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: I have confirmed that is correct. That's not in the document here before us. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Deputy Minister Kalgutkar.

MR. KALGUTKAR: Thank you, Madam Chair. What's before us is the borrowing plan for the 2021-2022 fiscal year. What the Member, I believe, is asking is when we are projecting to exceed our borrowing limit in a future year, and I believe the fiscal framework that we provided as part of our fiscal update shows that we are going to be slightly over in the 2023-2024 fiscal year. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Deputy Minister. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Right now, if we're on projection to hit that, and a bad forest fire season costs us \$50 million, we don't want to ever be in a position where we are going to exceed our borrowing limit. When I hear that that projection takes us to the life of this Assembly, exceeding it, does the Minister of Finance have a plan or specifically a number that we want to be below our borrowing limit at the end of this Assembly? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. With respect to a plan, there are two sides to the coin, Madam Chair. Firstly, we need to get a better handle and control on the expenditures to ensure that expenditures don't continue to rise when revenues remain stagnant. To that effect, there are a number of things that are under way. I know there has been talk already about government renewal as an opportunity to look more carefully at the creation of each departmental budget and ensure that each one is utilizing the resources that we have most efficiently as possible.

There are other steps under way, Madam Chair. For example, a significant one is in Health and Social Services authority having a fiscal sustainability plan, as well. Those are two areas, two significant areas, to get the expenditure side under control.

Madam Chair, the other side of the equation, of course, is to increase the revenues of the GNWT which, itself, can have different pathways, but the particular approach that I think we are looking at right now is ways of increasing growth within the economy, which would, of course, then increase the revenues through all of the different revenue streams that come in through own source revenues. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. What I would like to see in the fiscal strategy is a number, a kind of a hard stop of where we are going to be at the end of this Assembly. Right now, the projection is that we're going to be over our debt wall. I recognize what the Minister said there, that there's a number of plans in the works and we're looking at revenues. I am concerned that I am passing a budget with adding more debt, and I am on the projection to pass, succeed a debt limit that does not leave us any room for emergencies. When all that work is done and when we do the new fiscal management, when will we get a new projection of our debt that is below the debt ceiling? Perhaps, I'll try that question. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the projections obviously do get -- I think the Members will appreciate that they are being done continually, and particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, they were being redone every so many months. That will continue throughout the time of the pandemic because the pandemic has impacted on the government's position quite significantly, which is in no short order why we wound up with increasing the borrowing limit when we did in the first place.

I think at this point, Madam Chair, it would be appropriate to say that we will continue to do those updates periodically. Again, back in the spring session, we'll be back with another fiscal update at that time, and by which point, hopefully, there'll be a better sense of what's happening economically across Canada, across the world, and with respect to COVID-19's impacts thereon.

Broadly speaking, the Department of Finance and ECE are expecting between now and the time of

business plans for next year to go through the government renewal process, and I will have more information on the state of the Health and Social Services position. I think by the time we are doing, if not the spring update, then certainly by the fall update, at that point, I am hopeful that will be in a position to give a better projection of where we are at, and hopefully one that's showing a number under the borrowing limit. If we're not, then at that point, to be at least having a sense of when that next update might come. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to switch gears here to the lines here in our P3 debt. Perhaps I could have the Minister explain to me a little about how we account for P3 debt. I note that, let's take one project, the Tlicho All-Season Road here. The debt went from \$74 million to \$128 million, but I believe the total cost of that project is \$400 million over 30 years. Can I have someone explain to me how P3 debt shows up in regards to the total debt limit of the GNWT? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am going to propose to have that question directed to the deputy minister, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Deputy Minister Kalgutkar.

MR. KALGUTKAR: Thank you, Madam Chair. The P3 debt is the portion of the project that is being financed by the private sector partner, and what gets accumulated as part of that debt is depending on how fast the project progresses. As the Tlicho All-Season Road gets near completion, we recognize a portion of that debt on our books. The full value of the P3 debt related to that project, I think it is slightly over \$150 or \$160 million. It's not the full value of the \$400 million, just like the full value of the hospital bed is not reflective of the total cost of the project. It's just a portion that is financed by the private sector. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, deputy minister. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Perhaps, I could just ask one more question of that. Obviously, a key factor in the total cost of any P3 is the contract and the maintenance contract. If we have a deal with the private sector to pay them X amount of dollars each year under the P3, does that show up as our debt, the contractual obligation? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Perhaps, I'll just let the deputy minister continue on the explanation on the P3s, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Deputy Minister Kalgutkar.

MR. KALGUTKAR: Thank you, Madam Chair. The total contractual obligation shows up as a note disclosure. I don't recall the note offhand, but the total value of the contract shows up in our public hands. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, deputy minister. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: We had this question, kind of lengthy conversation with the Auditor General about P3s, and I know there's new P3 public accounting standards coming out and that office is trying to deal with this issue of how to track P3 debts and ongoing contractual obligations, especially when you get into such large numbers over such a long period of time in the debts. Does the Department of Finance foresee any changes arising from public accounting standards to P3s that will ultimately affect what our total debt is listed to, listed as here in relation to P3s? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. The simple answer, Madam Chair, is no, and the Department of Finance, I know we also have an opportunity to meet with the Auditor General's office and discuss the accounting standards and how they impact debts. I have had that conversation now on a couple of occasions, and I'm not anticipating anything to have significant change here, no.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Lastly, we are projected to go over our debt ceiling. I recognize we're not anywhere near our five percent overall debt servicing finances of Fiscal Responsibility Policy, but I think that number is a little skewed in that we fund half of our infrastructure usually with debt, and then we switch to P3s. The full amount that we actually owe under P3s given the contractual obligations isn't really reflected as debt, and I think this is creating an incentive for us to use P3s. It seems every project over \$50 million, we're going to use as a P3, which means we're going to have this debt on our books

and these contractual obligations that don't actually show up here.

Is the Minister of Finance willing to revisit the financial Fiscal Responsibility Policy and given the work that's ongoing with P3 reviews and make sure that perhaps outside of this page, which is a page probably best represented for making sure we're in line with our borrowing limit, that all of that debt and that contractual obligation is factored in, in a fiscally responsible way? Are there changes to the Fiscal Responsibility Policy given our increase in use of P3s? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Fiscal Responsibility Policy right now is not certainly part of any of the active reviews that are under way. Certainly, the Department of Finance, in general, which is responsible for management of the borrowing plan of the Fiscal Responsibility Policy is part of what we will be getting under some review in the next coming months.

Madam Chair, I just would note that even on projects that are large projects, they would have the debt amortized over the course of time regardless. There are other public accounting techniques that would demonstrate when there's a large infrastructure project, or a large infrastructure asset that comes online. P3s are one way of paying for it. There are other projects that aren't done by P3s, but they still have to get shown over an extended period of time. P3s are not the only large project that show up over time.

I'm not sure if that's entirely answering the Member's question, but just to point out that there are different accounting standards, and different ways of demonstrating when there are, as I say, assets and items that come on line over the course of a period of time. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Thebacha.

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am going to go back to those P3s, especially the one with the Stanton Territorial Hospital. In the estimated balance, it has \$130,431,000 and an estimated balance in 2022 of \$127,129,000, so that could not be on the balance, Madam Chair? I am just wondering because it already goes down less than \$3 million, and we know the project is almost \$1 billion with the 35 years. We also know in that same P3 that we also have the legacy building next to it that we don't own anymore because we turned it over then to renovate, and that is part of the P3. When we go back to accountability and

transparency, I would like complete clarity on how exactly these two projects, both the Stanton one and the Tlicho all-weather road, are accounted for.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. The amounts that are going down here are showing the amount of principal that is being paid down. As for the legacy building, I think that is reflected under health and social services. I do not have that information here, but if there are outstanding questions on that, I will certainly ensure that that is made available to the committee.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Member Thebacha.

MS. MARTSELOS: This is just on the principal, and they also have all the maintenance and all of the services that they are taking care of in that building. That is on a separate line, or is that somewhere on your -- that will be in Health and Social Services. Right? Because I was looking at trying to match this with what is in Health and Social Services, and it's very unclear.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, so this is showing only the debt that is owing and the principal on the debt that is owing. The operations budget for Stanton would come in under the Health and Social Services authority. I would expect, Madam Chair, that we likely could put a total project analysis together. Madam Chair, actually, Deputy Minister Kalgutkar was actually quite involved on the Stanton project. Perhaps, I would suggest, he could also give a bit more clarity to MLA Martselos.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister of Finance. Deputy Minister Kalgutkar.

MR. KALGUTKAR: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will just use Stanton as an example. When Stanton went into procurement and then went into construction, just like every other project, the full value of Stanton shows up in our capital estimates, and the Assembly votes on the annual amounts related to that project. What is showing up on the borrowing plan is just the private sector's long-term debt that they have incurred to help finance that project. When Stanton went into operations, then the O and M part of that, there is a service payment that is on the department of health's annual main estimates. That payment includes several components. It includes the debt servicing component. It includes also the annual O and M and deferred maintenance that we pay BHP for that project, so the O and M side is shown in the

department of health's operating budget that the Members will see later this session. All this is showing is the P3 debt that is on our books. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, deputy minister. Member for Thebacha.

MS. MARTSELOS: I want to go down now to the NWT Hydro Corporation. There is \$105,084,000. What does that include in that \$105,084,000 of borrowing? What is that? What does it include?

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do not have the detail here, but I anticipate Deputy Minister Kalgutkar might be able to provide a bit of background on that.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Deputy minister.

MR. KALGUTKAR: Thank you, Madam Chair. The \$105,000,000 is actually made up of several projects. It's the capital plan that the Power Corporation wants to undertake in 2021-2022. The major project, if I recall, that is in that plan is the purchase of the Hay River franchise. There is, through a couple of long LNG projects, one in Fort Simpson and one in Lutselk'e, that are on that plan, and also, I believe there is a Taltson refurbishment project that is on that plan. Those are the four major ones. The rest of it is made up of several small projects. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, deputy minister. Member for Thebacha.

MS. MARTSELOS: One of the items on there is the purchase of the franchise for Hay River so that it goes back into NTPC. Right? It comes under the auspices of NTPC. Is it precedent that we are paying for a \$16-million purchase for a municipality? I mean, I am just wondering if we are starting to set a precedent here. You are doing this. Northlands Utilities is partly owned by all the Aboriginal groups of the Northwest Territories, and the only reason why they are doing this is because they say the cost of power is going to be less. We all know that is not going to happen. Then Hay River is buying it, and you guys are buying this. Then the other part of the factor is, and I know this for a fact because I used to sit on this board, that all the legal fees were paid by the Government of the Northwest Territories to fight these Aboriginal groups, all the Aboriginal groups in the Northwest Territories, in court, and all those legal fees were paid by the Government of the Northwest Territories. Am I right?

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am not as versed in the operations of the Northwest Territories Power Corporation, obviously, not being the Minister responsible, but certainly, I wouldn't say that there is any particular precedent per se at this point. Although, again, I am hesitant to speak on behalf of the Minister responsible for NTPC. The legal costs, there certainly have been legal costs borne by the Northwest Territories Power Corporation at this point, so they are the ones who have paid their own legal fees. Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Thebacha.

MS. MARTSELOS: What I am getting at is that we are always saying that we are going to support Aboriginal and northern business, and here we are once again. This is a Crown corporation under the auspices of the Government of the Northwest Territories, and we are paying \$16 million for the assets of Northland Utilities in Hay River. I find that is, for clarity, not our mandate, and we are setting a precedent. The next time, over here, when the Yellowknives want to get out of it, we are going to start that here, too, with Northland Utilities? I know they just signed a five-year deal because I keep track of everything that comes through here. When its time is up, you are going to pay how much there for that asset. You are going to go more in the hole, and you are still not going to pay lower power rates. I don't know how you think, physically, but that is not a way business will be run. No business, private business, will run like that. Just because it's government, you can go around and do these, make these crazy transactions, and it's okay. That is not transparency. That is not clarity. That is not accountability. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Did the Minister want to respond?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Sorry, Madam Chair. It's simply to say that, obviously, this is really a matter that should go to the Northwest Territories Power Corporation, to the Minister responsible for the Power Corporation to speak to, whether or not there is anything to be taken from the approach here, whether there is any change in future approaches. However, with respect to the borrowing plan here, as I say, it's really just reflecting the projects, including the Hay River project but not exclusive to the Hay River project, and showing the impacts that that has on the total borrowing plan of the government. I am not really best placed and am hesitant to speak for my colleague. No doubt my colleague is listening,

Madam Chair, and hopefully more thorough responses can be provided to the MLA in due course. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Yes, I, too, am concerned about the NTPC bond issuance. This is new debt. I know that we ran into a problem last year where bonds were issued for new debt and Regular MLAs didn't really feel that we had been properly informed that it was going to be through a bond issuance, so I appreciate the increased transparency with the borrowing plan this year. How is a member of the public supposed to understand what this bond issuance is really for the NTPC? Is there a publicly available list of what these assets or what this capital stuff is supposed to be? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I anticipate we certainly could get some further information. It really is reflective of the capital plan of the NTPC so, to the extent that that capital plan is being approved and has been approved and is available publicly, then that would demonstrate what projects are under way and planned for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation. By utilizing the GNWT to support the issuance of bonds and their borrowing, they are saving I believe upwards of several million dollars because of the ability of the Government of the Northwest Territories to have a better rate, so that is the benefit of doing a bond issuance. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Is there a long-term capital plan for the NTPC or an asset management plan or something? Last year, they got \$40 million in repayable bonds. This year, it's \$105 million. It's jumping around. Is there a long-term capital plan, and if so, can the Minister provide that to us as Regular MLAs? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, absolutely there is, and we'll certainly provide that.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I appreciate that commitment, and it would be great if that kind of information could be made available to the public, as well. The loan guarantees line toward the bottom of this page, can someone explain what that is about? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pretty sure I asked the exact same question, and I asked it to the deputy minister. If I could perhaps impose on him to answer the Member, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Deputy Minister.

MR. KALGUTKAR: Thank you, Madam Chair. The previous practice was for NTPC to undertake their own borrowing for their capital plan, and the Government of the Northwest Territories would guarantee that debt. Because it was proved to be more beneficial for the government to issue borrowing on behalf of NTPC, because we are allowed to then pass those savings on to the rate base, we started undertaking that borrowing on their behalf, starting, as Members know, last year. That's really the old borrowing based on previous practice. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, deputy minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair, and thanks for the response. I, too, want to speak to the Fiscal Responsibility Policy. I'm not sure that it really captures what happens with P3s in an adequate way because, as I am starting to understand a bit better, a lot of the P3 expenses and really long-term debt are being sort of taken out of the long-term borrowing plan and put in as operational expenses through the annual payments we have to make for the operation of the facility that are going to go on for 33 or 35 years, or whatever is left in the contract. I'm not trying to ascribe motives or blame or anything, but it just seems to be a way of changing long-term debt into ongoing operational expenses, which eats into our ability to spend money as part of our O and M budget. How does the Fiscal Responsibility Policy really account for P3s, and is it time that we really looked at the Fiscal Responsibility Policy to make sure that it includes this diminished capacity to spend money on O and M? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Fiscal Responsibility Policy really doesn't speak to operations and maintenance

budgets of any of the infrastructure projects that are at issue. It speaks to the funding of the infrastructure project itself, so it wouldn't be reflected in the operation of the asset, whether that is a P3 asset or otherwise. Obviously, it seems that perhaps there needs to be a further briefing or discussion around the Fiscal Responsibility Policy and what it includes, but the fact that it doesn't include the operations of an asset that happens to be a P3 is not, I would suggest, the area of issue or the area of concern to be focused on because that is not its intention. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Like my colleague from Yellowknife North, I believe that the potential for P3s is starting to create an incentive to do large infrastructure projects in that way so that we take some of the long-term debt off the books, so to speak, and put it into long-term contracts that affect our capacity for O and M spending. I do think it's starting to create an incentive do to that, and I'm not sure, with all of the criticism that there has been in the past in other jurisdictions about P3s, that that's a great way to proceed.

I do think I want to take the Minister up on that opportunity to have a briefing on the Fiscal Responsibility Policy and look at it more closely, but I want to go to the total consolidated borrowing. It looks like it's \$1.59 billion at the end of this upcoming year, and that is getting, to me, pretty close to the debt limit of \$1.8 billion. We're going to exceed that in a future year if we stay on this track. I guess I'm worried about what would happen if we had unforeseen circumstances around forest fires or something. We're going to exceed this long-term borrowing debt perhaps as early as this year or maybe next year if there were some unforeseen circumstances. Do we actually have a longer-term plan to not exceed the debt limit, and if so, what is it? Thanks, Madam Chair.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. No, we're not projecting to hit the borrowing limit this year or next year, and the reality is that there is a lot of projections in here that continue to be fairly conservative, not the least of which is the revenue projections. For example, the performance of our corporate sector or our industry sector, whether it's royalties or whether it's corporate taxes, we do tend to take a fairly conservative approach in terms of the projections. I am not concerned about hitting the borrowing limit here. The other side is, of course, there are contingencies built in both to the borrowing limit and contingencies built into, if I'm not mistaken, the

Department of ENR, for example, around better ways to protect the ability to protect forest fires and other potential natural disasters. No one could have expected COVID-19, for instance, and that certainly has had an impact, and yet, especially with support from the federal government, the overall spending on COVID-19 has been one that has been manageable. It's my expectation that that approach will continue, that the contingencies built in and the approach built into making estimates and projections is conservative enough that we will not be hitting that borrowing limit this year or next. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. One more quick question: where does the supplementary reserve fit in on this page, somehow? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Madam Chair, if I could perhaps suggest the deputy minister is a better place to explain the supplementary reserve, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Deputy minister.

MR. KALGUTKAR: Thank you, Madam Chair. The supplementary reserve is on the operation summary page. It's not reflected on this sheet. I can't even remember the page number, but when you look at the sheet that shows what our total revenues are and our total expenditures, that comes out, that then calculates what our projected operating surplus is for the year. That's where you will see the supplementary reserve number. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, deputy minister. Member for Great Slave.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Trying to dive through all of this, I am looking at the line item for the capital leases under the Government of the Northwest Territories subheading. I note that we currently don't have debt on the books or projected for the end of 2022; however, there is the \$500,000 in contingency noting that the contingency is based on the working capital requirements. As the note says: Does the government anticipate that they are going to take on new debt or some sort of new expense here that we haven't currently been spending money on? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, as I was just saying, there are a number of contingencies fairly conservatively built in. I am not expecting right now that there would be any need for this, but it is an item that is, again, put in here to ensure that there is sufficient flexibility and room in the fiscal plan and in the borrowing plan to not have anything unexpected that's not built into what we are projecting. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Great Slave.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I know what a contingency is. I am curious to know what you anticipate you would be now accruing or what would be occurring under capital leases. Do you expect to hire more people for the government and have to expand office space? I'm just curious to know why that's showing up there as a contingency. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Perhaps I will suggest that we direct this one to the deputy minister from the accounting perspective as to why we decided to include it on this line item here. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Deputy minister.

MR. KALGUTKAR: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just like the other contingencies that are in that column, we are not anticipating undertaking any leases that would be deemed capital leases, but the government does enter into lease arrangements during the course of the year that may or may not be assessed as a capital lease depending on the terms of those lease arrangements. We just wanted to provide a bit of flexibility in there just in case. When the terms of those agreements are reviewed by the Comptroller General's office and they are deemed capital leases, then we would have some flexibility to record them there. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, deputy minister. Member for Great Slave.

MS. NOKLEBY: I'm still curious to know what those potentially could perhaps be, but I will move on. I just wanted to come back to some comments made by my colleagues around coming close to the debt limit. I, too, am concerned to see that we are doing a lot of borrowing now and spending a lot of money in what I feel like should start to become more of an austerity type time, not taking on new debt.

However, that being said, when the Minister commented around what she thinks will reduce that or not make us hit that limit, it was about comments around Health and Social Services or the health authorities and their fiscal sustainability and then the government renewal, which are both going to take some time, I imagine. What I am concerned is to not hear anything around the mineral resources sector, et cetera, which I understand is not in this part of the budget. However, being that it is 40 percent of our GDP, I will be having questions for the Minister when she puts her other hat on as ITI, so thank you. More of a comment.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Great Slave. I will take that as a comment. Did you have any other questions? Do we have any other questions on the borrowing plan from Members? No further questions on the borrowing plan? Borrowing plan for the government reporting entity and establish borrowing limits for the Government of the Northwest Territories, total consolidated borrowing, \$1,587,475,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Does committee agree that consideration of the borrowing plan is completed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, committee. We will now move on to the Department of Finance. Committee, we will defer the departmental summary and review the estimates by activity summary, beginning with the directorate, starting with page 140 with information items on page 143. Questions? Does committee have any questions for the directorate? Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. There is a contribution here to the NWT Housing Corporation, and I am wondering if the Department of Finance has begun conversations about converting the NWT Housing Corporation to a regular GNWT department? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: No, we have not, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am wondering if, from the perspective of the Department of Finance, why it is important that the

NWT Housing Corporation be a corporation? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. That, really, I anticipate, would be a question for the Premier and certainly all of Cabinet, not one that I am going to be in a position to answer here, but obviously, the matter can go to Cabinet in due course. That's a bigger conversation that, again, I have nothing else to unfortunately assist the Member with here today. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The increases to the NWT Housing Corporation really are quite exciting ones, because they have to do with the co-investment fund, which we on this side of the House are very happy to see. Outside of the influx of money for the co-investment fund, does the Minister foresee increases to the Housing Corporation contribution beyond that? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am, again, not entirely well-versed or well-placed necessarily to answer all of the details with respect to the Housing Corporation. Perhaps I could suggest if there is anything else within here that the deputy minister of Finance or secretary to the FMB might be in a position to provide some further detail, aside from getting to the Minister responsible. I will take it to the deputy minister for now, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Deputy minister.

MR. KALGUTKAR: Thank you, Madam Chair. In addition to the \$5 million that we are providing them to start drawing down the co-investment fund, the Housing Corporation also received \$190,000 in forced growth funding for some various shelters, I believe. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, deputy minister. Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. One of the things that has come up quite frequently with committee is the conversation around travel. Now, this would be for everything to do with all of the divisions to have to do with the Department of Finance. Given that we are still in a pandemic and that many people are trying to only do essential travel outside of the Northwest

Territories, does the Minister foresee actually using the department's travel budget during this fiscal year? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. The travel budget as it is approximately, over time, roughly over 80 percent of it tends to be Northwest Territories-based travel, and I do expect that travel within the territory will be increasing with more frequency over the coming months and certainly over this fiscal year as compared to last. With respect to the remainder or the other portion of the travel budget, certainly in the past, it has been a critical part of being able to attend to Ottawa, for instance, for FPT or federal-provincial-territorial meetings, which certainly have moved online. While I would like to hope that the situation with the pandemic changes, I have no ability to know what will happen with other provinces or territories. I do expect that there will be ongoing lapses in the travel budget this year, but at this point, without knowing what the full impacts of the pandemic will be, I don't expect that there will be changes to the base budget this year. Thank you, Madam Chair

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. No, I appreciate that. I think that travel within the NWT is very important to continuing business with the people of the Northwest Territories, but I think it's also important that we make sure that, if the remaining 20 percent is not being spent, it is spent on things that are important to the people of the Northwest Territories.

My next question I am going to ask to the directorate section, even though it has to do with, again, all divisions of the Department of Finance. I note that the Department of Finance and specifically human resources is tasked with the Indigenous employment framework, and so I am wondering if the Department of Finance has set targets for Indigenous hiring and Indigenous staffing for this fiscal year. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, the Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Framework certainly is being led by the Department of Finance. There were some delays over the last year going out and doing the consultation that was considered appropriate and necessary, but that is back on track now. I am just confirming, Madam Chair, but I believe that it's

expected that this program will get underway this fiscal year. However, I don't have here in front of me, the exact date when we would expect to have that underway, so I don't have targets in place now. The idea with the framework is that the Department of Finance and human resources specifically works with each department, including our own, to set those targets and to see what to track over time and to set targets. As soon as I have targets, I can certainly commit to bringing those back to committee.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Are there any other questions under the directorate? Member for Monfwi.

MR. LAFFERTY: Madam Chair, probably just a quick question because, every main estimate and budget plan, we talk about NWT Housing Corporation, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation contributions. As you know, it's coming to an end in 2038, 17 years from now. I am sure this is an ongoing discussion with Finance and housing. What's the plan going forward? It will be depleted. We have got to start planning now. I am just wondering where things are at with that, Madam Chair. Masi.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I am certainly alive to the date at issue. However, Madam Chair, I am simply a little bit hesitant to step in on a matter that really should be going to the housing Minister or to the Minister responsible for the Housing Corporation. What I would suggest to do is to take that back to my colleague and to make sure that we have an answer that is done in collaboration between finance and as well with the Minister responsible. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member.

MR. LAFFERTY: Masi, Madam Chair. Obviously, we need to be provided with that detailed information. I know for a fact that there has been ongoing discussion with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, NWT Housing Corporation, and Finance, with the federal ministers. We are at a critical stage. We can say 17 years is a long time, but it's going to fly by. We are already into year one, over year one, of our term here, so I am looking forward to that detailed information because we need to have a plan now. No questions at this point, but I will look forward to the information that will be gathered for the Members here. Masi.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Monfwi. Are there further questions under the directorate? Member for Great Slave.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am just looking at the line for fees and payments, how in the actuals it was at the \$9,000, and then it has gone up. I notice a few times we had actuals which were quite a bit lower, which makes sense given COVID. However, could the Minister speak to whether or not there was any exercise done to look at perhaps not going back to the original budgets before and doing a bit of a sort of fat-cutting or leaning of budgets now that COVID has sort of changed the operating world we are in? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am pleased to have the question. That is really in part one of the directions we may wind up going in doing government renewal because, rather than sort of stepping in and "leaning," to use that term, or cutting automatically without knowing what, in fact, trends are, what, in fact, the impacts or outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic will be into the future, the preferred approach at this point is to do something that is methodical, to do something that is value-based, and to do something that will actually gather up evidence in a way that allows us to make decisions that are, in fact, evidence-based.

However, I certainly appreciate the fact that we are all wanting to be alive to the changes that are likely to come from COVID-19 without necessarily knowing what, in fact, those final changes will be. Simply to highlight again, I am alive to that, to the conversation, to the issue, and I do think that what these impacts are going to be is going to come out in part probably over a short course of time and then also over a longer period of time as things move on. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Great Slave.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you. I do appreciate that the Minister is cautious about wanting to not take things away that later on are not going to be able to be added back or easily added back. However, I do know that there have to be some very obvious things that are not going to be coming back for the next year, let alone two to three or four years after that, so I kind of wish or I do wish that the government had taken both of the approaches, really. My comment on that is that -- you are waving at me; I have lost my train of thought -- that there should have been. Yes, so my question would be: Would the Minister commit to coming back to us when a lot of this money is not spent and seek

Members' input into how that money is being spent? Because it does really come across as continuing to keep money in the budget that then Cabinet can make decisions as to where it goes or departments can make decisions as to where it goes without it coming through the Members for input. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I have actually spoken to the department about the fact that there is a live discussion happening right now with Members of the Legislative Assembly about where does money go when it does not get utilized in a budget, so I am alive that that's an issue. It is rightfully an issue, and so I will certainly commit that we have to come back and do a better job of that. I am hesitant in saying that. There are times where there may be a small amount that gets moved from if there is an unfunded position and then -- I am trying to think of a good example right now, off the top of my head, Madam Chair, and it is not coming to me. However, some flexibility is needed. Some flexibility is appropriate. At the same time, as I said, I am very alive to it. Exactly the issue that is being raised by the Member is not new to me and I think is one that is coming up more and more, particularly in a year when we have seen such changes. I am going to find a way to come back to committee. I just need to figure out exactly how that is going to look so that it's functional and meaningful.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Great Slave.

MS. NOKLEBY: I think I heard a commitment in there to ask us for our inputs on spending the extra money, so I am happy with that. Those are all my questions. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Great Slave. Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

MR. NORN: Marsi cho, Madam Chair. I am just looking at page 141 here. I know that it's not a big difference. I apologize if another Member asked about this. There are the actuals there, and it's a little bit of a difference there, \$37,000 and then \$83,000. Can the Minister just explain that difference? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Sorry, I'm not seeing a \$37,000 line item. Is this under contract services, Madam Chair? I believe that is the line item that we are looking at. The actuals for 2019-2020 were at \$37,000. The

set amount of budget for contract services 2020-2021, as well as now, 2021-2022, is \$83,000, Madam Chair. There would have been a freeze back in 2019-2020 at the time of the election, and that would have had a significant impact on contract services that year, a difference of \$46,000.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member.

MR. NORN: Marsi cho, Madam Chair. Thank you for that response. Also, for purchased services, there is a bit of difference there. It's almost double from the actuals. Can the Minister explain that difference, as well? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. The item in purchased services is with respect to telecommunications services. There have been some updates to phone systems over the last couple of years, and as such, there have been some cost savings. That is an item that has not yet seen itself reflected in budgets. I certainly could commit to confirming whether or not that cost savings is one that will need to be reflected over time. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member.

MR. NORN: Marsi cho, Madam Chair. A little bit down the road, I'll ask the Minister how we can improve the communications at Lutselk'e because it's not too good there right now. I did have another question, but I'll just ask to be placed back in the queue. I lost my train of thought. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thanks. Are there any further questions? Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at the Department of Finance's business plan, and it said that the Public Service Act was scheduled for introduction in 2020, quarter four. That did not occur. Could I get a sense of when we will see the Public Service Act? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. At this point, we are under a notice to bargain and, as such, can't be making any changes to the Public Service Act. We will take that one step at a time at this stage. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. That's unfortunate. We seem to be stuck in this never-ending cycle of getting a notice to bargain and then bargaining taking years so we can never amend the Public Service Act, and then we get another notice to bargain.

Is it possible to seek agreement from the union to bring the act forward even while there is a notice of bargain or to make the change that allows us to bring the act forward despite that happening? I'm just trying to see if there is a workaround with the union's consent because they themselves have identified some changes that that they would like for the Public Service Act. I am hoping that perhaps there is a path forward to do this somehow, or is that just legislatively prohibited so we can't change the legislation? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, certainly, work can continue with the consent of the union. We only just received the notice of bargain, I was going to say last month, but not quite; I believe it was in December. It hasn't been that long since that's occurred. I do very much believe in the importance of maintaining a good working relationship with the union, so any next step would have to involve consulting with them before any kind of other commitments could be made.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am also looking at the department's business plan, and I see that this May-June session, we were supposed to see the Status of Women Act updated. I don't believe we have seen the legislative proposal for that yet, but can I just get confirmation of whether that work is on track? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. That item, Madam Chair, falls under the women's directorate and the Minister responsible for the Status of Women. I expect that the committee's position on the best location for that is, in fact, that it should be over in the executive and not in finance, Madam Chair. Meanwhile, it just so happens that, as Minister responsible for the Status of Women, I can say that there is work under way on the act, and I can commit to getting confirmation of whether or not it will be on target to

be introduced as planned. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Are there any further questions under the directorate? Seeing none, please turn to page 141. Finance, directorate, operations expenditures summary, 2021-2022 Main Estimates, \$82,789,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. We will take a five-minute break.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Page 144, with information items on page 146. Questions? Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. In the department's business plan and in the mandate, there are a number of issues related to increasing capacity in the healthcare system, and there is a specific health recruitment unit. Can I just get clarification whether that lies in the Department of Finance HR or in Health and Social Services? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. The health recruitment unit that is being described is a joint partnership between the Department of Health and Social Services and the human resources branch of the Department of Finance. They have the expertise in terms of what is actually required and the human resources has the expertise in terms of human resources recruitment and retention planning, so yes, it is both, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. I recognize that reconciling human resources into one area in the GNWT makes sense, but I think, when I speak to a lot of people in the health authorities, there has been frustration in the past with human resources and there has been frustration about having not-nurses hire other nurses and not having healthcare professionals having had that expertise. I recognize that's exactly what this joint unit is trying to remedy, but is there any consideration to giving the human resource capacity back to the health authority? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. By doing this joint project, that is really meant to alleviate both sides of a concern, which is to ensure that staffing processes remain fair and compliant with best practices and with transparent processes, while also ensuring the expertise within the client department, in this case the health department. Hopefully, if the unit does achieve the targets that are being set to increase recruitment and retention of healthcare workers, then perhaps that is a question that I will be coming back to in time as to, if this is, in fact, successful, what that might mean for others who may have staffing challenges. For now, hopefully we are, in fact, accomplishing exactly what the Member has identified as a challenge. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Are there any other questions? Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. NORN: Marsi cho, Madam Chair. I had a quick question about labour relations in the Public Service Act. Is it okay if I ask that question here, Madam Chair? Marsi cho, Madam Chair. I know a lot of my colleagues here on this side, we talk about LPs and moving things along. We don't want to have what happened in the last Assembly where they had a whole slew of last-minute legislation that we had to go through, and I started to see a trend here where we're kind of slipping on some of our LPs, in my opinion. Just looking at the Public Service Act here, can the Minister just give us an update on how that's coming along and just give us some timelines of when we can expect to see some of this LP come along through the House? Marsi cho.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is a particular act where there had been quite a lot of work done a few years ago, back in 2017, and a fair bit of engagement done with employees and stakeholders, and there were already materials being drafted under a "what we heard" type of approach. Of course, an update was done last summer, again, as an update, not a complete full further review or survey but an update to the work that was done only two or three years before that, and consultations throughout with the union, the UNW, as well.

However, as I just mentioned earlier, it was on track and a lot of work was being done, but then, when we do receive the notice to bargain, there does need to be a pause. As I mentioned earlier, it is possible, if both parties are willing, to continue ongoing engagement and work toward getting materials ready, but having just received the notice of bargain right before, if I'm not mistaken, the

winter break, the winter shutdown, I realize that's now roughly a month ago or just a little over a month ago. What I will do is follow up and ensure that we are taking steps to have that engagement. It may well be that it is simply not going to be feasible, while the negotiations for collective agreement are under way, to advance that work, and that might be quite reasonable for either party to take that position. Nonetheless, because of the work that has been done a few years ago and this summer, whether it's by agreement or whether it's at the conclusion of a new collective agreement, I'm confident we will get this work back on track. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

MR. NORN: Marsi cho, Madam Chair. Thank you for that little bit of clarity, there. What I'm thinking right now is if the Minister could give us some just rough timeline, given what she just explained to me, and how this would be rolled out to the eventual introduction of the bill? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't have a date in front of me, and I'm sure that's because it's dependent somewhat on what happens with collective bargaining. What I will commit to doing is perhaps doing a bit of an either/or and trying to come up with a sense of what some different timelines might look like, subject to again the different ways that this might unfold.

Again, I want to emphasize the importance of having a conversation, having a consultation with the union. They're a key party in this work and in this process, so wanting to ensure again that that we look at whether we do it right now on consent, whether we maybe collectively agree to hold off until the bargaining process is done, that I can commit to figuring out what those different options will look like. Then I will get back to committee with what the results of that would be and what the impacts on a timeline will be from either scenario.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

MR. NORN: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for that. Hopefully, I look forward to seeing that in committee at some point. Again, just a quick comment, just to end off this part. Like I said at the beginning, again, my colleagues, we all do feel the same way. We don't want to get completely overwhelmed with LPs towards the end of this Assembly because I think it's important that we get ahead of things and not be knee-jerked towards the

end of the session because it will mean that you won't have good quality legislation. You want to make sure that we're very thorough and doing all the due diligence or consultations, et cetera. Those are my comments. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Do you want to respond, or are you good?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Are there further questions to the Department of Finance and human resources from any Members? Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm wondering if the Minister can speak to the cultural awareness training rollout, and if there are any additional budgetary line items specific to that or if that is considered complete for this fiscal year, and what GNWT employees can expect to see as far as that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. There has been significant work done to revamp, redevelop the cultural awareness sensitivity training under what would now be termed or called, Living Well Together. It is an online program which does allow it to roll out across the GNWT to all public servants. It is expected that this is going to be mandatory for public service to complete. Madam Chair, I've had an advanced screening of it, and I've had a chance to look through the product. It was done in consultation with Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities across the Northwest Territories, so I believe it will be ready to go quite imminently. I think within the life of this session, and I will look forward to making that announcement in the House, again, hopefully this session. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Are there any budgetary requirements for this fiscal year for that program to be able to roll out? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't believe so, but if I might just confirm with the deputy minister to see if I've missed anything, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Deputy minister.

MR. KALGUTKAR: Thank you, Madam Chair. No, there's no further commitments to that program. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, deputy minister. Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am happy that the Minister has seen a pre-screening of this, and I am wondering if this cultural training includes any form of trauma-informed care for staff? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, Madam Chair, it does. The briefing materials I have in front of me don't go through it, and I don't want to misstate it. I remember from just looking at it myself that the introductory materials, both in terms of the materials online as well as the materials in the workbook that accompanies it, are aware and alive to having some sensitivity to trauma-informed practice. What I would suggest, Madam Chair, I think it is something I also agree is very important. I will commit to just getting more details on exactly the extent of what's included in the materials for the committee. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Any further questions under the human resources? Seeing none. No further questions. Please turn to page 145, Finance, human resources, operations expenditure summary, 2021-2022 Main Estimates, \$21,840,000. Does community agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. We will now move to Information Systems Shared Services beginning on page 147 with information on page 149. Questions? Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. The first line item here, government chief information officer, the revised estimates for 2020-2021 showed \$2.8 million, and then otherwise, it's usually around \$385. Can someone explain to me what happened in that, the current year, to make that such a large expense? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. There was an additional \$2.412 million approved to help accommodate the costs

associated with safe reopening of the Northwest Territories schools as part of the COVID-19 pandemic response. This would have included, for example, computer devices and electronic devices, Internet connectivity devices, turbo sticks, to students who may not have had access to those resources otherwise. That is the reason for this particularly high item in 2021. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Is it just an accounting thing that it shows up in Finance rather than ECE? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. This was a joint item, so there are also items that, when you have an opportunity to look at ECE tomorrow I believe, you will see there are going to be items reflected there, as well, for the safe reopening of schools. It was the tech component, the technology component that fell within the chief information officer's area, so as I say, again, a joint item between the two departments, this portion, the technology portion, being with us. Other elements fell within ECE. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Thanks for the information. One of the things that was promised when ISSS was formed a few years ago, and it resulted in 70 people being moved around within GNWT to move to Finance, was that there was going to be a critical mass of people and that it was going to make responses on designing computer-based systems and databases a lot quicker and better and so on. Has there actually ever been an evaluation carried out of that function, and if so, can the Minister share it with us? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't know that we have actually completed that at this point, but I did anticipate that there may be some technical questions. Perhaps, as I say, again, while I don't think that's been completed to date, I would like to suggest turning it over to the chief information officer, just to speak a bit to what work has been done so far in that consolidation and what improvements may have already been realized. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Mr. Wind.

MR. WIND: Thank you, Madam Chair. What we have done is developed a performance management framework or at least a preliminary performance management framework, the measures of which are reflective in the performance measures that will be published in the department's business plan going forward. The outline of those are available within this document. The challenge in looking back retroactively and evaluating past performance prior to the establishment of the ISSS was that measures and performance management metrics did not exist in departments beforehand, so it's difficult to have a comparison to.

One of the primary objectives of establishing the ISSS was to start to consolidate and kind of simplify the technology environment and reduce investment over time. That is something we are moving towards with, for example, the eServices program and developing a common application architecture to support these services across all of the GNWT. It's also going to be what allows us to move forward with the open government initiatives related to open data and things like that. Prior to establishing the ISSS, those functions would have been done in a more disjointed fashion across all the different departments. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Mr. Wind. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair, and thanks for that information. I am kind of surprised that we did not actually have a program evaluation framework or some kind of evaluation framework prepared in anticipation of this change. Can I get a commitment out of the Minister that she is going to share what she can at this point with what these performance measures are that have been identified and a timeline to actually get this evaluation done? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, we can certainly get the information that has been completed to date on this. Lucky Department of Finance, we are up first to go through a government renewal process this spring, so it may well be that more comes out of that process. Of course, we will be continuing to bring all committee members, all members of the committee, up to speed as that process unfolds. Yes, in the meantime, we will get together what we can that has been put together. Just to make a comment, I agree with the Member's point some time ago that we need to improve the culture

evaluation within the GNWT, so I do certainly share that perspective. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Yes, thanks, Madam Chair. I wish the Minister was here two or three years ago, when this was being talked about because I raised that at that point and was kind of fluffed off and nothing was done. I shouldn't say nothing was done. It just seems like we have not made the progress that I think we should have. I just have one more question on this, which is: I presume that responsiveness to departmental needs is going to be one of the performance indicators; can someone confirm that and how it's going to generally be measured in some way? Because part of the rationale for doing this was that departments were going to get quicker and better results in designing their web-based applications and databases and all this kind of stuff, and if we are not measuring that and we do not have some way of tracking that, I don't know what we are doing. Can I get some sense of how that responsiveness to departments is being tracked and identified over time? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, I will turn over in just a moment to Mr. Wind, but just by way of some example, when COVID-19 took hold last spring, when all of the government was being asked as much as possible to work from home for the safety and protection of all residents, we did roll out the Teams meeting software. There was, in fact, tracking underway about how quickly it rolled out and tracking about help inquiries that came in and tracking as to the effectiveness and use of the software and its functionality. I have seen firsthand the ability to do that, that cross-government work, in a quick fashion and in a hurried fashion in response to the pandemic. I know the question is more general than that, but certainly that was, I would suggest, a success that was seen and is providing a whole other level way of doing business, which speaks to some of the other questions being raised about where we are going to find some efficiencies. However, to the more generality of the question, if I could ask Mr. Wind to comment, please?

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Mr. Wind.

MR. WIND: Thank you, Madam Chair. There are two measures that have been identified in the performance management framework, I think, that relate to the Member's comments. The first is around the effective implementation of approved

IMT capital and O and M projects, and the measures are the number of approved projects completed on time and the number of completed projects delivered on budget. We will also be introducing outcome measures for projects, as well, so that we will be able to assess whether or not projects deliver the intended outcomes, that they are not just delivered on time. Also related to that, we will be undertaking an annual client satisfaction survey with our peers in the departments to assess client satisfaction with the ISSS, as well. Those are the two that I think most closely relate to the Member's comments. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Mr. Wind. Are there any further questions under information systems shared services? Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Looking back, I support the creation of ISSS, and in many ways, I actually do not think it went far enough in that, still, when I want to ask questions about data, I notice the corporate information management is in Infrastructure, and they have been taking years to get all of our departments on DIIMS; when I want to ask questions about ATIPP and trying to figure out that, I go to Justice; when I want to ask questions about open data, the policy actually lies with EIA, so despite a lot of resistance, perhaps just some centralization of information systems. I still do not believe they are centralized enough, and I do not believe there is the coherence or vision of what we are doing with all of our information and our data and how we actually treat it as a government.

A bit of a pitch there for, if we are looking at corporate restructuring perhaps there is more work to do here. This also goes to me not fully understanding the information systems shared services and where the line is between them and Infrastructure. Can I just understand where information systems shared services functions start and the corporation information management in the Department of Infrastructure ends? I recognize I am getting pretty technical, but it's not every day I have the chief, Mr. Wind, in front of us. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Madam Chair, this is exactly why Mr. Wind is here. I will turn it over to him, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Mr. Wind.

MR. WIND: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will try to keep this as plain-language as I can, but please push me if you need to. The role of the chief

information officer really sets the strategic direction for what we refer to as the information and technology sector across the Government of the Northwest Territories. While I do not have a line responsibility over all aspects of the information and technology sector, I have a dotted-line relationship to all of them, and they all report back through my office and through the division of governance, planning, and security around strategic planning, policy development, and things like that.

They also fall under our umbrella from a cybersecurity perspective and the development of standards and practices that span across the sector. The biggest operational entity within the ISSS is the application services division. That division is responsible for developing websites, managing our digital presence, building databases and business applications to support the program areas of the government. That is different than the role of the technology service centre and corporate information management, which are in infrastructure.

The technology service centre is responsible for what we refer to as the core infrastructure, so servers, storage, network, desktops, and laptops, things of that nature. Corporate information management is really the records management and information branch for the Government of the Northwest Territories, as the Member mentioned, responsible for the implementation of the digital integrated information management system or DIIMS, along with the broader records policy framework within the Government of the Northwest Territories. I hope that helps. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Mr. Wind. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, that does help. I am trying my best to understand this area because I think it actually does not get often the oversight it needs. IT projects are notorious for going over budget, and software is very expensive. It's one of those areas where we spend millions and millions of dollars. I think many people's eyes just glaze over when it starts getting talked about, but it is not an insignificant part of the budget, both finances, procurement of software, and the ultimate management through this ISSS. I have spoken previously to the Minister about having an open data portal. Sorry. Also, in my list of areas that I forgot to mention, there is the NWT statistician, who is another office I often go to when I want to try to get some information about where information is. I believe ultimately there is a lot of work to do in kind of compiling this, what all the various departments have and the various roles and maybe having it in a very nice, searchable, open data portal. That is my dream. Can I get an

update from the Minister on that work and if and when we can expect to see an open data portal? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. There certainly was an expectation. I had an expectation that we would bring some of our bundles of services online under the eServices portal this month or imminently. I think that, in fact, there has been identified a need to push that date back a little bit, but again, since we have the chief information officer here, I might ask him to give us the latest update, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Mr. Wind.

MR. WIND: Thank you, Madam Chair. We have made some work on the open data portal. We have actually landed on the core technology that we'll use to implement the open data portal. The work that we still need to do before we can actually develop the portal and implement it is related to the data management framework that we've identified within the business plan to do some work.

We have taken that plan back through the Open Government Steering Committee that I've spoken to in the past, which is chaired by myself and by an assistant deputy minister within IEA. That work is really going to set the guardrails for how the government will manage data and information and publish it through the portal. That's an important piece that has to happen alongside the development of the portal, or we will run the risk of launching a portal that has no data and doesn't necessarily deliver the value. That's the big body of work, and there will be an interdepartmental working group to work with us on that, that will comprise members, for example, of the Bureau of Statistics, population health, certainly Environment and Natural Resources, and other very heavy data-dependent departments to develop that framework. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Mr. Wind. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to hear that, and I recognize that one step, as I said previously, is getting the portal. The whole other step is populating it, and how we actually start to publish and release our data. I have a few more questions about the eServices portal in that I think we've got some of the low-hanging fruit in fishing licences, the DVM, which is already online, kind of moving that into one place. I believe there are going to be healthcare cards, marriage certificates; some basic information was in there.

Ultimately, what I would really like is this information shared services to direct departments to get all of their applications online into one portal. I'm thinking Housing Corporation, Income Assistance, the kinds of social services programs where we are constantly having to go bring people into offices, and I know my constituency assistants are filling out forms all the time. I guess that work is much harder, but I think it is much more valuable for the kind of work, if you can get that onto an eServices portal. Can the Minister speak to how this ultimately could expand to get other departments to have online applications for their services? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I also think that, frankly, eServices and the work of ISSS is perhaps under-highlighted. It is not by accident that the chief information officer is with us today. The Member is right, that the first couple of bundles do include, for example, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Services, fishing licenses, healthcare cards, applications and renewals of some of the vital statistics items, so those are examples of the first two rounds of items that are going to be coming.

As for the rest, Mr. Wind has already mentioned the working group that will be existing that is cross-departmental, meant to be exactly that, to start looking at information that is required and utilized across departments, so that it will be a whole-of-government approach and one that really does look, again, across all the departments. I don't know that the Department of Finance gets to direct anybody to do anything per se, but again, by having that departmental working group and highlighting the importance of the work here, I think that we will be ultimately achieving the goal that is being sought. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes. I wish that perhaps the chief information officer could direct people or the Department of Finance could direct departments. I'm going to go on a bit of a tangent here about digital government. Essentially, there are governments where all of your information is stored in one area, and you log on to fill out an income assistance form, and all of the government data that it is already holding populates the form automatically. Actually, some of those governments have policies that they can never ask you for a piece of information twice. They can never ask you what your birth date is on a second form, once you have given it and put it into a portal. I don't know how often I am helping constituents duplicate and

fill out forms for seven different departments over seven different areas. Other governments have figured this out. They have figured out how to do this in eServices portals. I recognize it takes time and money to get it done, but the cost savings are immense to governments. The headaches are saved. My question for the Minister is: Is there a way to kick some of this eServices work up to the Cabinet table and give authority to kind of centralize this and really get it moving? Because I think there is nothing but opportunity here. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Did you have any follow-up comments, Minister?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Only to acknowledge that this isn't in the priority document that we came up with as a government or as a collective 19 Members, but certainly all of us have to assist constituents. Those of us in Cabinet have to receive the requests from constituents, so the challenges being discussed or presented by the Member are not lost, I don't think, on anyone here, and they are certainly not lost on me. As I said, I also agree that the eServices work is very exciting and, yes, it was not by accident that I wanted to make sure that we had the chief information officer here because I do think it's important to have this dialogue and this conversation. That's the kind of thing that will help advance the work. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Are there any further questions under the information system shared services from Members? Seeing no further questions, please turn to page 148, Finance, information system shared services, operations expenditure summary, 2021-2022 Main Estimates, \$22,883,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. We will now move into management board secretariat, beginning on page 150, with information items on page 154. I am just going to remind Members that we are going to be having a hard stop at six o'clock, so get your questions and answers to the point, shorten them just to the point. Thank you. Questions to the management board secretariat from Members? Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Two of the line items in here under the grants section are the aviation sector support and the wage top-up, both of which were very well received from the business community. I know that they were both received as contributions from the federal government, and I am wondering if the Department of Finance is talking with the federal government to continue that, given that, one,

aviation isn't going to continue, and two, for the wage top-up, the wages that people are receiving, topping them up to \$18 an hour is a bare minimum of something that we need to be doing in the Northwest Territories and something that would be wonderful to be able to continue for the people of the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Madam Chair, you said short questions. The short answer is, yes, we are continuing the conversations with Transport Canada around the aviation sector support. I don't have anything more to say yet, other than just that. We are working on, indeed, a third phase that would, I hope, be similar in nature to a partnership in terms of Transport Canada and the GNWT providing supports. With respect to the cost of living and the wage top-up specifically, that is still ongoing right now. Those funds have not been exhausted. As for the specific timeline over which that will be unfolded, I don't have an update offhand, but I can certainly provide committee with an update as to where those funds are at. Any longer-term changes to wages and wage top-ups would probably go over to ECE. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'll be sure to ask the Minister some of those questions tomorrow. As far as the Mackenzie Valley fibre link and the cost of Internet, the Department of Finance, in my understanding, correct me if I'm wrong, sets the wholesale rate for Internet throughout the Northwest Territories using the infrastructure, and then companies come in and add on a retail rate for that. Something we hear about quite often from our constituents is the cost of Internet and the service that is provided. I'm wondering if the GNWT is, at all, discussing the wholesale rate and how they can work with Internet service providers to reduce the cost of Internet throughout the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Internet service providers and Internet rates are quite heavily regulated in the Northwest Territories by CRTC. Certainly, we do have, at the Department of Finance, ongoing discussions with the major players in the industry here, but as I say, a lot of that is going to depend on the work that is being done with CRTC and not with GNWT specifically. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Firstly, can I get a sense of how many people have accessed the NWT Wage Top-Up Program? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am sure I do have those numbers. I just may not have them in front of me right now. Perhaps I will turn it over to the deputy minister. He may have those numbers at his fingertips.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Deputy minister.

MR. KALGUTKAR: Thank you, Madam Chair. To date, we have about 390 applicants that have applied for the program. We have processed 376 of those applications. We are still in the process of processing the rest right now. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, deputy minister. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can I just get clarification: Those 390 applicants would be employers; do we have a sense of how many actual people are getting their paycheques topped up right now? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I did not make the effort to hunt for those documents. Let me see if the deputy minister happens to know that detail, as well. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Deputy minister.

MR. KALGUTKAR: Those are 391 applicants based on, I believe, about 85 employers. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I believe I had different numbers than that, but I will clarify if the department could get back. This is one of those budget lines that I find extremely frustrating that, in passing this budget, we are going to give all of our low wage workers, who we deemed essential, a pay cut. Many of them were making \$18 an hour, and they'll go back down to \$13.86, which is less than you make on income assistance. I have a number of constituents who will be getting a pay cut the minute we pass this budget. My dream would be that I flip over to ECE, and we

have some sort of increase to employment subsidies. I will have those questions for the Minister tomorrow.

Can we make sure that we don't just simply give this money out and then lose the information? Is there going to be some sort of reporting at the conclusion of this about how many people accessed the money in what sectors? I think this is extremely valuable information, that there are hundreds of people in our work force who make less than \$18 an hour, and we essentially decided to top up their wages and now are removing that. Is there any sort of final reporting on this that could be provided when it is concluded? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is money that we were fortunate to receive from the Government of Canada. It wasn't entirely an item that was able to be funded from within the GNWT's own-source revenue streams. It was a COVID-specific program introduced by the Government of Canada. To be quite honest, yes, certainly, I would say that the information that we are gathering about who is applying and which sectors they are from, I would see no reason why that would simply disappear.

One other note I would make is that it has actually been difficult to spend all of it insofar as there are not that many people making under the \$18 an hour threshold. I don't know what that says to the nature of things in the Northwest Territories. It certainly does accord with the information in the economic update around our wages and income earned in the Northwest Territories generally, but the short answer is we will certainly not be getting rid of data. That's not the direction we are going in. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at the Department of Finance's website on this. It says 1,943 individuals have benefited from this program, which is the number I had in my head, which is a much more significant percentage of our work force. I believe our work force, if that's more accurate, is about 2,000 workers who make under \$18 an hour, which is below living wage, which means 2,000 working people live in poverty. Can I just get a confirmation of how many people have accessed this program? I don't think it's a fair characterization to say that not many people in our territory are making under \$18 an hour. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do have the numbers here in front of me. We had 391 applications coming from 94 different businesses to just over 2,100-and-some individuals. This was for all workers 15 years and over. Somebody who is 16 is not necessarily in a situation where they need to be making a living wage if they're still living at home, and it does also include people who are working in the service sector where -- it's not a statement but simply a pro or con to this -- they may well be in a situation of making tips on top of wages.

I think the point is that there is some more analysis that could be done about which industries, which sectors, which businesses are, in fact, paying the \$18 an hour wage, but it's not quite as simple as to say that the 2,100-and-some people who have benefited from this program were all not making a living wage. I think it's a little bit more of a complicated story than that. The point, though, is to go and figure out, maybe, what that story is to the extent that we're able to. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I recognize that, perhaps, there's a debate about whether 15-year-olds deserve a living wage. Perhaps there's a debate about whether service industry workers, when they have tips, should make less than \$18 an hour, but I know there are actually thousands of people on this program, many of whom were grocery store workers, people we deemed essential, and now, with the passing of this budget, the Department of Finance has decided that they do not deserve to make \$18 an hour or that it's not a priority to top up their wages.

I know ECE has a number of different wage subsidy programs kicking around. They do different things, and they cater to different labour forces. I think that this is a priority area of, essentially, the working poor. If you're on income assistance, it doesn't make sense to go and get one of these jobs right now. You just don't make that much money.

I guess that I will leave it at that, and I would like to see the Department of Finance find a way to maybe extend this program, and if that has to work with ECE, then that's okay. If we have to take servers and 15-year-olds out, that's okay, but I think that the passing of this budget in the middle of the pandemic for \$4 million means that 2,000 workers were making \$18 an hour, and I think this is one of the most frustrating budget lines in the whole thing. That's a comment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. We will move on to Member for Great Slave.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am just going to ask about the net fiscal benefit transfer to the Aboriginal parties. I'm probably duplicating maybe some of what my colleague was asking around the Heritage Fund, but my understanding is based on percentages of royalties that are earned from the mineral resources sector. Understandably, this is why 2019-2020 is quite a bit lower, but then, again, like everywhere else, we come back to pre-COVID estimations again. I think it's really optimistic to think that we are going to be getting the same type of royalties that we were getting pre-COVID going forward. I get the reluctance to not want to adjust budgets. However, this is a payment out to Indigenous organizations that we are now putting in the budget and putting an amount in. Maybe this is something that's always problematic, but then it states to me that we are sort of making a promise of a payment that potentially we are not going to be able to fulfill. I get that everybody understands it's based on fluctuating royalties and revenues. However, again, this is an area where I do not see why we would not have been more realistic in our budgeting. Maybe the Minister can speak to that? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, Madam Chair, this is a base budget that was developed coming out of devolution, when certainly the amounts that were anticipated for resource royalties and that were being received for resource royalties were much higher than what they are right now or certainly what they have been in the last year. What would happen is that the amount lapses; it does not get paid out. It's not actual money right now. It's not here. It's money that we are anticipating and that would then, if the revenues are supported, if the actual revenues are supported to reach this goal, that amount is paid out. If it was not here and we actually achieved this, we would be coming back for a supplementary appropriation to pay out whatever the actual amount is. However, all that said, I would agree that this is a particular line item where we do not need to rely necessarily on the devolution data from several years ago, now that we can do a better job on this one of mending what is here to be more reflective of the actual sum. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Great Slave.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, you just reiterated what I said, which is that it's going to be dependent on that, so again, I really

struggle with why we sit here and have these numbers that are not realistic, creating extra work for ourselves later on to come back and adopt. The answer coming back is, "Well, this is what we do." Well, you are the government; it's what you do. I do believe changes can be made. You just commented that this one could be made, so I am not sure why then that argument flies for other areas, such as travel, et cetera. Yes. More and more, I just feel like this creates confusion, creates areas where the Cabinet or the departments can move money around without us having oversight on it. We are in an unprecedented era, so perhaps the GNWT needs to start doing things in an unprecedented manner instead of just saying, "This is the way we have done it," because we are not in a normal time. I am sitting here trying to agree and pass a budget that you are telling me is not realistic right from the start, so I feel like it makes it very hard for me to do my job and be diligent. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I have also raised my concern with respect to the idea of doing base budgeting and incremental budgeting, which is exactly why I am proposing to do the government renewal initiative and do a value-based budgeting. I am not proposing to simply come in and pick one area or another without evidence and without knowing what the values are and then say we are going to make adjustments. That, to me, is not the right way to make policy changes.

This is a particular item where it is an item that lapses if it is not received because it is owed to Aboriginal parties, and it is not one that we can move around. It does not get moved around. It does not get shovelled. It simply lapses if we do not achieve the amount that is available to be transferred to the Indigenous groups and Indigenous governments, so that does make it a little bit easier and different than some of the other ones which are in base budget amounts. Now, again, I do hope that there are ways that we can start to do a different approach to budgeting, and that is exactly what we are bringing about, starting this year. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Great Slave.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you for that. Forgive me if I do not hold a lot of optimism in the GNWT's renewal and studying and the siloed approach, to then again bringing down our silos as we go through department by department. I really do not see that this is going to lead to a lot other than talking for the next two years, nothing changing,

and we continue on in the exact same manner. More of a comment. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Are there any further questions under management board secretariat? Member for Thebacha.

MS. MARTSELOS: I have just got a couple of questions. One of them is, first of all, the Summer Student Employment Program because it comes under human resources and all of this department, so is that going to go back to its original quotas that they had? Last year, they hardly hired anyone. This is the concern that I have.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Ms. Martselos. That is back from the human resource section that we passed or we agreed to, but if the Minister of Finance wants to just give a response?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. There certainly was a pause put on when COVID-19 came about, and there was a lot of uncertainty in what would be happening as workers were all moved to working at home over the spring and summer. Now, that said, as of December 1st, there are openings already posting for students for 2021, for the summer of 2021 as well as for the 2021-2022 internship program, so it is certainly my hope that the program will be back up to full speed and full strength. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Thebacha.

MS. MARTSELOS: I disagree with one of my colleagues. I believe in the renewal strategy because we have got to start making decisions that are based on proper financial statistics and the dollars that we have and what we have to work with. The way things are done now, it's not okay. That is not the way you would run a business. That is all I have. Just a comment, no more questions.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Are there any further questions under the management board secretariat? Seeing none, it's a good place to stop. Noting the time, I will rise and report progress.

MR. SPEAKER: Report of Committee of the Whole. Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes.

Report of Committee of the Whole

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 Tabled Document 286-19(2), Main Estimates 2021-2022 and, Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of Committee of the Whole be concurred with.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. May I have a seconder? Member for Nunakput. The motion is in order. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

---Carried

Item 23, third reading of bills. Mr. Clerk, Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Mercer): Orders of the day for Tuesday, February 9, 2021, at 1:30 p.m.:

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
5. Replies to Budget Address (Day 4 of 7)
6. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
7. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
8. Returns to Oral Questions
9. Acknowledgements
10. Oral Questions
11. Written Questions
12. Returns to Written Questions
13. Replies to Commissioner's Address
14. Petitions
15. Tabling of Documents
16. Notices of Motion

17. Motions
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
 - Tabled Document 286-19(2), Main Estimates 2021-2022

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 Tuesday, February 9, 2021, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 6:02 p.m.

