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**The Honourable Frederick Blake Jr, Speaker**

# Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

## Members of the Legislative Assembly

### Speaker

**Hon. Frederick Blake Jr.**  
(Mackenzie Delta)

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**Hon. Diane Archie**

(Inuvik Boot Lake)  
*Deputy Premier*  
*Minister of Infrastructure*  
*Minister responsible for the NWT Power Corporation*

**Mr. Ronald Bonnetrouge**

(Deh Cho)

**Ms. Caitlin Cleveland**

(Kam Lake)

**Hon. Paulie Chinna**

(Sahtu)  
*Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs*  
*Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation*  
*Minister responsible for Homelessness*  
*Minister responsible for Youth*  
*Minister responsible for the Public Utilities Board*

**Hon. Caroline Cochrane**

(Range Lake)  
*Premier*  
*Minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs*  
*Minister responsible for the COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat*

**Hon. Julie Green**

(Yellowknife Centre)  
*Minister of Health and Social Services*  
*Minister responsible for Persons with Disabilities*  
*Minister responsible for Seniors*

**Mr. Jackie Jacobson**

(Nunakput)

**Mr. Rylund Johnson**

(Yellowknife North)

**Mr. Jackson Lafferty**

(Monfwi)

**Ms. Frieda Martselos**

(Thebacha)

**Ms. Katrina Nokleby**

(Great Slave)

**Mr. Steve Norn**

(Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh)

**Mr. Kevin O'Reilly**

(Frame Lake)

**Ms. Lesa Semmler**

(Inuvik Twin Lakes)

**Mr. Rocky Simpson**

(Hay River South)

**Hon. R.J. Simpson**

(Hay River North)  
*Government House Leader*  
*Minister of Education, Culture & Employment*  
*Minister of Justice*

**Hon. Shane Thompson**

(Nahendeh)  
*Minister of Environment and Natural Resources*  
*Minister of Lands*  
*Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission*

**Hon. Caroline Wawzonek**

(Yellowknife South)  
*Minister of Finance*  
*Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment, including responsibility for the Business Development and Investment Corporation*  
*Minister responsible for the Status of Women*

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**YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES****Tuesday, February 9, 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 1:33 p.m.

**Prayer**

---Prayer

**SPEAKER (Hon. Frederick Blake Jr.):** Item 2, Ministers' statements. Minister of Health and Social Services.

**Ministers' Statements****MINISTER'S STATEMENT 107-19(2):  
COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT IN THE NWT**

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon. Today, I am going to provide an update on the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in the Northwest Territories. As Members are aware, the NWT started delivering the COVID-19 vaccine to priority residents on December 31, 2020. Rollout began only a week after Health Canada approved the use of the Moderna vaccine in Canada and only three days after the territory received its first shipment.

Since the beginning, the GNWT's approach to delivering the COVID-19 vaccine has been grounded in five core values: equity, cultural competency, evidence-based decision-making, flexibility, and trust. These values are outlined in detail in *Immunity for our Communities: The Northwest Territories COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy*, which was released last month. Department of Health and Social Services and Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority staff have worked alongside local healthcare staff and community members to bring vaccines to residents across the North.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to share that the NWT has delivered 12,833 first doses and fully vaccinated 299 residents against COVID-19. I also want to highlight that our vaccine teams visited all 33 communities in just under a month. Given the significant logistical and geographical challenges of this rollout, not to mention the cold chain requirements of the vaccine, this is an incredible achievement. Throughout this process, the GNWT has made every effort to translate our vaccine communications into all 11 official languages,

through informative handouts, videos, or audio on local community radio stations. Local interpreters, knowledge keepers, and community leaders have been offered to be champions of the vaccine campaign and encourage its uptake.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to meet with Indigenous and community governments on a regular basis to keep them informed of our progress with vaccine delivery and listen to the needs of their communities. In line with our reporting to the Public Health Agency of Canada, vaccine dose data continues to be updated weekly on the GNWT COVID-19 website. Helpful information and resources can also be found there, including videos, fact sheets, and frequently asked questions about the vaccine.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of Cabinet, I would like to take this opportunity to thank local health care staff, travelling vaccine teams, communities, and residents for making our vaccine delivery so successful to date. One of three NWT adults has already received their first dose. With every dose given in the NWT, we boost our territory's defense against COVID-19. The NWT is, in fact, leading the country with our ambitious delivery of first doses and has recently been commended by the federal Deputy Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Howard Njoo, who stated: "Given the geography and the challenges of our winter weather, it is a credit to everyone involved in the vaccine rollout that it is progressing well and on track." We would also like to express our gratitude to the federal government for their generous allotment of vaccine we have received to date.

Despite the recent announcement of the temporary delay of Moderna shipments to Canada, the NWT remains well positioned to receive enough vaccine for 75 percent of the adult population by the end of March 2021. We knew that the allotment and delivery of doses were both outside of our control, which is why our team built a flexible vaccine delivery schedule to account for shipment delays, weather, or other logistical challenges.

Mr. Speaker, we want to reassure residents that we have a plan in place to optimize our vaccine supply over the coming weeks. We have received our third shipment of 4,700 vaccines, and we are waiting for an update about the fourth shipment. With that

information in hand, we will announce any changes to our plan going forward. I remain committed to keeping the public informed through scheduled media briefings as well as communications channels online, on the radio, and through on-the-ground staff in person. It is important to remember that the public health measures and surveillance system that have protected NWT residents from COVID-19 so far are still in place and working extremely well.

We will continue to use every possible tool to protect our territory from COVID-19, including public health orders, effective wastewater testing, point-of-care testing, self-isolation, and vaccine delivery. Together, we can keep COVID-19 from jeopardizing our well-being and move toward loosening restrictions when conditions are right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Ministers' statements. Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 108-19(2):  
NWT CLIMATE CHANGE COUNCIL

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Strengthening the government's leadership and authority on climate change, ensuring climate change impacts are specifically considered when making government decisions, and increasing the use of alternative and renewable energy are mandate priorities of the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly.

Climate change continues to be a critical issue facing us today and is affecting the Northwest Territories in many ways. That is why the Government of the Northwest Territories is taking real action to address climate change through implementing the NWT Climate Change Strategic Framework 2019-2023 Action Plan. One of the commitments the Government of the Northwest Territories made to strengthen our leadership and authority on climate change is to establish the NWT Climate Change Council. I am pleased to say that we have made progress on that commitment with the finalizing of the council's terms of reference.

Mr. Speaker, the Climate Change Council will be a forum for information sharing, collaboration, and engagement between representatives of Indigenous governments and organizations, community governments, and the Government of the Northwest Territories. It will provide guidance and advice to inform Government of the Northwest Territories' climate change and environment programs. The council and the Government of the Northwest Territories will also be advised by industry, non-government organizations, co-management bodies, and academia.

Mr. Speaker, not only has the Government of the Northwest Territories worked to establish the Climate Change Council, we have also released our first progress reports on our territory-wide approach to climate change in January. Environment and Natural Resources, the lead department for climate change, along with the Departments of Infrastructure and Finance, jointly released four reports:

- ENR's NWT Climate Change Action Plan Annual Report;
- Infrastructure's NWT Energy Initiatives Report;
- Finance's NWT Carbon Tax Report; and
- ENR's Plain Language Overview Report summarizing our government and partners' activities to address climate change.

The reports will collectively help keep our residents informed on the progress we are making on this important issue. We are making progress. Almost all actions under the Climate Change Action Plan are underway, and we are well-positioned to continue to transition to a low-carbon economy, improve knowledge of climate change impacts, and build resilience and adapt to climate change.

Mr. Speaker, another mandate commitment our government has made significant progress on is ensuring that climate change impacts are specifically considered when making government decisions. The Executive Council and Financial Management Board decision-making instruments have been updated to ensure climate change factors are considered and documented, as applicable, in decisions moving forward. This is a substantial milestone as the Northwest Territories is one of the few jurisdictions in Canada to include climate change considerations in its government's decision-making processes. This means that, moving forward, Cabinet and Financial Management Board decision papers, submissions, and legislative proposals will include climate-change factors for consideration. Integrating climate change considerations will improve accountability in the Government of the Northwest Territories' decision-making process.

Mr. Speaker, Northwest Territories residents are profoundly impacted by climate change, and the Government of the Northwest Territories must show leadership in addressing its impacts and opportunities. By working together both within our departments and with our partners, we can transition to a low-carbon economy, strengthening our understanding of the effects of climate change, and build resilience and adapt to a changing climate now and for future generations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Ministers' statements. Item 3, Members' statements. Member for Thebacha.

### Members' Statements

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON MIDWIFERY PROGRAM

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Midwifery Program in the NWT was first started in Fort Smith in 1993. Soon after, midwifery services also began to be an option in Hay River with a goal to one day service every community in the NWT. Unfortunately, this goal was never fulfilled, and Fort Smith and Hay River remain the only two NWT communities that offer midwifery services.

I support the expansion of the NWT Midwifery Program. I support midwifery to the fullest extent. I appreciate the fact that it offers a culturally relevant birthing option for people who want it. Not everybody wants their newborn delivered in a hospital many kilometres outside of their home communities. I know families who would much prefer to deliver their newborns within their own communities rather than a regional hospital.

In 2017, the Government of the Northwest Territories released a report titled "NWT Midwifery Stakeholder Engagement," which provided 10 recommendations for how the government could improve midwifery expansion in the Northwest Territories. Following this report, the Government of the Northwest Territories accepted all 10 recommendations, which include strengthening the Hay River and Fort Smith programs and establishing a territory-wide program to service Yellowknife as well as the Tlicho and Sahtu regions. Since then, two new positions were funded in 2019 to start up the territorial program in Yellowknife, but only one of them has been filled. An additional part-time position has been funded for Hay River, but no further support has been provided to the Fort Smith program.

Midwifery services have been a long time coming for most communities in the NWT. There is a growing interest among people all across the NWT who would like to utilize midwifery services. Therefore, I certainly hope our government will get a handle on developing the territory-wide program and have it operational as soon as possible. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON MINIMUM WAGE AND TOP-UP PROGRAM

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. The federal government introduced a wage top-up funding program on April 1, and that has been extended a few times, now to February 28, 2021. In most jurisdictions, the top-ups were restricted to the essential service sector. In the NWT, no such restrictions were applied and it is available to all employees who get less than \$18 per hour, even if their employer doesn't want to enroll. As of November 3, 2020, 83 businesses are participating; 1,943 individuals have benefited; and the total cost for the program is about \$1,700,000. That means the wage top-up program has been taken up by about 9 percent of the total NWT labour force, using numbers from the Bureau of Statistics.

The federal government is covering 75 percent of the cost of the wage top-up program. I support this program as it can support many of our service-sector workers who provide key programs and services, and it will assist with economic recovery. However, the need for this program is the clearest sign that our minimum wage is too low, far too low. \$13.46 per hour is not enough to get by on. That's no surprise to many Northerners. In March 2019, Alternatives North released research reports that calculated each parent in a family of four would have to earn \$23.95 hourly in Yellowknife, \$24.75 in Hay River, and \$23.78 in Inuvik for a basic standard of living.

In the NWT, the effective minimum wage has been \$18 an hour, even though the official minimum wage was set at \$13.46 an hour on April 1, 2018. Apparently, there is a mysterious Minimum Wage Committee that has been in place since 2013. It convenes every couple of years to review the minimum wage and make recommendations to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. There is virtually no information on any GNWT website about this committee, who sits on it, and what they look at. Even the reports seem to be secret as they are not on the ECE website and have not been tabled in this House.

It would be unbelievable, if not completely unfair, if the effective minimum wage in the NWT is rolled back from anything less than \$18 an hour, which is what people have been getting for the last 10 months. COVID hasn't changed the cost of living either, Mr. Speaker. I will have questions later today for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment about where we are going with the NWT minimum wage and whether he intends to roll it back. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Members' statements. Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES POWER  
CORPORATION BOARD

**MS. SEMMLER:** It has been almost five years since the 18<sup>th</sup> Assembly Minister responsible for the NTPC replaced the public board of governors with a board made up of GNWT deputy ministers. At the time, the public was told that this was done to save \$1 million. The GNWT also committed to undertake a review of governance structure. Members on this side of the House have pointed out that this is not best practice according to the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. Its report reviewing governance frameworks for Crown corporations pointed out that board of directors in Crown corporations should function independently of management. It has now been one year since asked the former Minister responsible in this Assembly to update the House on a plan for the NTPC board. Minister Thompson advised this House that the board of DMs had been instructed to come back with a governance model and that he would share with Members any progress made since 2016.

Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to be patient, but the GNWT is showing absolutely no progress on this work in five years. This makes me doubt their commitment in getting it done. I am also concerned that the deputy ministers may not have the necessary skills or technical expertise to tackle the governance of a highly specialized public utility. I am also concerned that they are doing this on the sides of their desk which we know that the government did not want that for those who are providing the work of the now COVID secretariat. The Power Corporation plays a vital role in the lives of all NWT residents. How it is governed and managed is something I care about on behalf of my constituents as it could help in lowering the cost of living. I am going to continue to press this government and the current Minister responsible to make progress on this important work with no further delays. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Members' statements. Member for Deh Cho.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON  
DIABETES PROGRAMS IN SMALL  
COMMUNITIES

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I would like to bring to the attention of the health minister the need for an effective diabetes program to be offered at our small health centres. The First Nations people are known to be high risk for diabetes, and we have many scattered First Nations communities throughout the territory. Some are not accessible by highway and are completely

isolated. It makes one wonder how do you manage without an effective diabetes program in place, even in my community of Fort Providence.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you about my experience being part of such a program during my employment in Hay River. The regional health centre has a dedicated diabetes team made up of three staff. Every three months, they notify you to have blood work to determine your A1C level and most times for the kidney check. A week later, they call you in with a group of about four to five diabetics. You are weighed, measured for girth and height, and everything is documented in the passport log booklet, including other info required as a diabetic.

Through this system, you can upgrade or have refill prescriptions prescribed. They also have healthy, sugarless snacks and food available to sample. The goal is to ensure your sugar intake is kept to a very bare minimum, if at all possible. You have to remember that diabetes is an ongoing chronic disease. If left unmanaged, this can lead to serious complications with one's health. This is a very well-run diabetes program and, sadly, not offered in the smaller health centres in the small communities. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the health Minister at the appropriate time. Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Deh Cho. Members' statements. Member for Nunakput.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON  
SOCIAL PROBLEMS WITHIN NUNAKPUT

**MR. JACOBSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today's weather, Mr. Speaker, it reminds me of home, drifting snow out here in the capital. Here in the capital, life is pretty good. You forget how life is like in our small communities back home. They have very little infrastructure. We have no luxury homes or houses. Our houses are small, overcrowded, and cold. There's not too much to do. No fine dining. No shopping malls. Even if there were places to spend money, Mr. Speaker, our communities, we have no money because we've got no jobs. There's nothing happening up in our riding. Many people depend on our government and this House to feed their families, Mr. Speaker. Right now, we can't even enjoy gathering, our sports events, our feasts, our celebrations of life because of COVID-19 pandemic, and social problems are even worse because of the restrictions.

I have been an MLA a little over nine years, Mr. Speaker. I'm saying this, the same things, some of these things over and over the past nine years. We need to help our people. We need change. Our government needs to do more to get our residents through this pandemic. We need to give your kids something to get them through and graduate from



high school. We must ensure the needs of our elders are met. We need to support our families, especially ones that are really struggling.

Our government, we can find money. In 2016, they found \$30 million to subsidize the Power Corporation. This past government this year, we have found \$87 million for the COVID secretariat, which is needed, but using that fund to try to help some of the programs I am asking for. The people living in our communities don't want a lot, Mr. Speaker. Their needs are simple. The political will, is there political will to help them? Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for Madam Premier at the appropriate time. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'm caught. Can you go with somebody else?

**MR. SPEAKER:** Members' statements. Member for Monfwi.

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON REPLACEMENT OF CHIEF JIMMY BRUNEAU SCHOOL

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Masi, Mr. Speaker. [Translation] Today, speaking of education, I would like to say that Behchoko, Edzo, and Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, it's been built 50 years ago, and the last renovation that was done in 1995. It has never been brought up or did any work on it. For so long, it's been an issue, and it is an ongoing issue. All the parents and students are worried, and we would like to see a new school built in Behchoko. Much later on today, I would speak further. [Translation ends]

The Chief Jimmy Bruneau School was built over 50 years ago. It is my age, Mr. Speaker. It was a retrofit back in 1995. It has been well over 26 years since the last retrofit of the building. Mr. Speaker, there have been a couple of meetings with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, the Minister, and also my Tlicho leadership on the replacement of Chief Jimmy Bruneau School. I believe we are making some progress. It is time that we move the project forward.

Mr. Speaker, there was a discussion on where the new school is going to be built, either in Edzo or in Rae. My understanding is that it is still undecided. That decision shall lie with the Tlicho general public in Behchoko on where the new school should be built. They are the ones who will live with this decision. The students of Behchoko, the students and their parents, have a message for the Minister of education. They do not want their school to be patched up yet again. They want a new school that

their children need and deserve. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment at the appropriate time. Masi.

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

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON INTEGRATED CASE MANAGEMENT

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, I introduced Avery, a real NWT resident with a fictional name. Avery is a parent facing eviction from public housing who struggles with substance abuse, mental health, and family violence in the home. Like Avery, many people in the NWT are dealing with similar issues. For this reason, the GNWT needs to provide better client-focused service. NWT residents who need the help of two or more GNWT departments can be referred to ICM, or integrated case management, a highly successful and compassionate team of pathfinders tasked with supporting vulnerable residents through the GNWT system.

Avery was involved with Justice, ECE, Health and Social Services, and housing. Facing eviction, Avery had 12 meetings and one phone call with representatives of those four departments. Despite this, Avery did not get a referral to ICM until a 14<sup>th</sup> meeting was held with me there as Avery's MLA. For Avery, getting on the list meant finding the right public servant at the right time. It shouldn't be so hard, Mr. Speaker. Asking for help is hard. Asking for help 14 times in one emotionally exhausting week is cruel. The GNWT needs to be empowered and organized to provide a way forward for vulnerable residents, not dead ends. Avery finally got into ICM, where the client focused service was a breath of fresh air. I cannot speak highly enough about their incredible staff, but client-focused service cannot be reserved for only a few of our residents.

Mr. Speaker, today, I will be asking the Minister of Justice to create a process for residents where they can self-refer to ICM and to create a process to refer residents to other support networks when they don't fit in ICM. Avery tried to self-refer and was advised of the department-only referral policy. There was no connection to additional support. No matter their story, every person wants fair and equitable access to programs to help them achieve the same success as their family, friends, and neighbours. For some, it is a matter of survival, and that's what makes it so important that the GNWT act quickly to respond to the needs of these clients. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. Members' statements. Member for Yellowknife North.

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ACCESS TO LANDS

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our job in this House is to get answers for our constituents and then, sometimes, when the same question is being asked over and over again, it's to get a department to move to actually solve an underlying issue. I would like to give a brief history of the Ingraham Trail and some of the answers I would like to leave this House from the Department of Lands.

Firstly, a history of land title. In the early 1960s and 1970s, anyone who went up to the trail, and in many parts of the NWT, and surveyed a piece of land could get that land in fee simple. This is one of the holdovers we have from the federal government. Additionally, in the Cassidy Point area, we handed out a number of equity leases. I believe 41 were given out in that area to provide people with title, and the department has another 180 to go. I have constituents all the time who have their neighbours who have title, and they ask: when can I get title? Despite numerous promises from different departmental officials over decades, they still don't have an answer to that question. I would like to leave this House with an answer to that question, Mr. Speaker.

I recently tried to figure out where the school board taxes go for residents on the Ingraham Trail. This took me through a journey to the Department of MACA, the Department of Finance, and the Department of Lands, and I am still unclear whether those taxes actually end up in a specific school board or whether they are just lost in general revenue. I would like to leave this House with an answer to that question.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents on the trail grow frustrated with how their properties are assessed. Some are a holdover of devolution, which have a different tax rate and a different assessment value. Some are recreational leases with yet another, different tax rate. I would like to have coherence to the taxing system to provide my constituents with an answer for why things are the way they are, before I leave this House.

Lastly, many people live on the Ingraham Trail in violation of their leases. They live in recreational leases that do not allow them to live full-time in those houses. They do not allow them to work from home, something that has been extremely difficult during COVID. The Department of Lands knows this. It acknowledges it, yet it never does anything about it. It never provides an option to convert to

residential leases. I would like to give an answer to my constituents about that. I will have questions for the Minister of Lands about when I can get these answers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Members' statements. Member for Great Slave.

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON MEDICAL DETOXIFICATION

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I am tired. At times, I feel like the weight of the world is on my shoulders. Daily, I speak with residents of this territory, my constituents and others, about the declining state of their mental health and their struggles with accessing help from the system. These calls and messages start first thing in the morning and can go until I fall asleep at night. Last night was no exception.

Yesterday, I spent hours talking with a resident who works in addictions. Their client, a chronic alcoholic at the end of their rope and shaking, spoke those words every addictions counsellor wants to hear: I am ready to get help. Off the counsellor went, and they arrived at the emergency room to get help. After several hours, close to midnight, the client was admitted to emergency, but the nurse tells the counsellor, "We can't admit them to the hospital. There are no beds. They will be discharged at 6:30 a.m. I am sorry. The system is broken."

While COVID-19 has caused so much tragedy around the world, with people unable to spend time with their loved ones, and so much death, the indirect impacts of the disease are only amplifying the cracks in our fragile social network, cracks that are quickly becoming vast sinkholes. The consumption of alcohol and drugs has increased across the territory over the last year, and in the last month, the NWT lost access to three southern treatment centres due to COVID outbreaks. No one treatment centre fits all, so we had people who desperately needed an inpatient program and could not get it. Had we already established our own northern in-patient treatment program, this needless suffering would not have occurred.

To make matters worse, it is a requirement of some treatment programs that patients be medically detoxed before patients are admitted. As I discovered last night, patients are often left on their own to take this important, medically critical step; a step that, if not done correctly, can lead to seizures and death. Unless they can prove they are a threat to themselves and be admitted to the psychiatric ward, our vulnerable people are given an office number to receive non-medical supports, open during standard business hours, Monday to Friday.

When will this Minister acknowledge that we have a medical crisis at hand regarding addictions and mental health? How can we continue to encourage people to seek help only to leave them unsupported when they do? Every time the system fails our vulnerable population, it erodes any trust that may have been developed and only drives our residents deeper into the cycle of addiction that they cannot escape. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services at the appropriate time. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Great Slave. Members' statements. Member for Nahendeh.

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON EULOGY FOR SUSAN DENEYOUA

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to honour and remember a constituent from Fort Simpson, Ms. Susan Marie Deneyoua. Susan passed away on December 16, 2020. I would like to thank her niece, Sharen Mandeville, and her sister for helping me put this together.

Susan was born on January 10, 1966, to Henry and Bella Deneyoua. She was to celebrate her 55<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. Susan had four brothers and five sisters. She went to school at Bompas Hall and TSS. Susan was a hard worker all her life. Growing up, her mom would ask her to sew, even though she was left-handed. She had a hard time holding thread, but she was ambitious and very determined. She enjoyed sewing uppers for others. She was one of the lucky ones who was taught the proper way of tanning a moose hide by her mother and father. It was hard work for her parents to scrape and twist the moose hide, and she was right there helping them.

She has a son, his name is Brandon, who I had the pleasure of coaching. Brandon and Nelsonia Lacorne blessed Susan with a grandson, Branson, who is now three years old. She cherished and loved her grandson a lot. She loved the outdoors. Picking berries was her favourite in the fall. Susan and her niece Sharen would get buckets full of berries and compete with each other.

Susan met Rufus Sanguiez from Jean Marie River, and they worked together doing contract work at Sambaa Ke Park in the summers, also cutting and hauling wood. She was a very hard worker and couldn't sit down very long. She loved cooking and washing and hanging clothes outside. She used a thing called a wringer washer, can you believe that, still to this day.

There are so many fond memories of Susan. Her niece shared memories of them cruising around in

her truck, and she would be teasing her. She'd slap her leg and say "how sick" and burst out laughing. Her laughter was infectious, and they'd laugh till they both said their stomach was sore. I had the pleasure of talking to Susan numerous times and she spoke her mind, and she was always about the people. Mr. Speaker, with deep regret, I will have to say that Susan will be sadly missed by us all. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON EULOGY FOR MAURICE EDWARD MENDO

**HON. PAULIE CHINNA:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize and honour the life of a truly inspirational mountain Dene Indian elder, Mr. Maurice Edward Mendo. Born in 1932, from the time he was born until he had passed away January 25, 2021, Mr. Mendo embodied in every way what it meant to be a Dene person. At every chance he got, he was on the land hunting, trapping, and educating others. If he wasn't on the land, he told stories and reminded the Dene people of their traditional history. For example, in a virtual exhibit by the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, on the celebration of Yamoria, the legends, Mr. Mendo contributed three powerful stories about the life and spirit of the Dene people.

Mr. Mendo taught himself to read and write in Slavey, which speaks to his intelligence and dedication. Mr. Mendo was a great elder who carried the spiritual backbone of the Sahtu people. He was always a strong believer in his faith, which was reflected in both his love for singing in the church and prayers for others. When others needed help, he was always there to provide support in whatever way he can.

Mr. Mendo was also a loyal and hard-working individual. He had retired from Imperial Oil after 20 years of service of excellent work. He was a board member of various organizations, of which he worked tirelessly for the Naats'ihch'oh National Park in Tulita located along the Yukon border. With his wife, Stella, they were committed to passing on Dene culture to their children, their grandchildren, more than 40 godchildren, and to the community, not just about things on the land, but also about dignity, kindness, spirituality, equality, and much more.

The death of Mr. Mendo meant we lost a unique way of how to think and navigate in this world. I know that he will be deeply missed by his family and the community. I myself will be forever grateful for him, as he had shared his knowledge and influenced the people of the Sahtu for generations

to come. During his time, Mr. Speaker, he had shared with me the equality of being in leadership and the fairness of being in leadership and working together as one, to be a stronger North representing our people. He had a lot of great messaging to share with people. He had also been very influential with the younger generation.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Mendo is someone who deserves our greatest recognition and appreciation in this session. I also was very intrigued and very touched by the Tlicho leadership who had attended his funeral and by the Chief of Wekweeti. Mahsi cho to his friends and family. He was an exceptional person who made the Sahtu Dene people a much stronger people and a much stronger region. He will be greatly missed. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Sahtu. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and the community. Members' statements. Item 4, recognition of visitors in the gallery. Item 5, replies to budget address. Item 6, reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 7, reports of standing and special committees. Member for Frame Lake.

### Reports of Standing and Special Committees

COMMITTEE REPORT 8-19(2):  
REPORT ON MOTION 5-19(2): REFERRAL OF  
POINT OF PRIVILEGE RAISED BY MEMBER FOR  
MONFWI ON MARCH 10, 2020

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures is pleased to report on its review of Motion 5-19(2): Referral of Point of Privilege Raised by Member for Monfwi on March 10, 2020.

[English translation not provided]

#### Background

The Legislative Assembly makes interpreters available in most Official Languages when Members are sitting in the Chamber. On March 10, 2020, a Tlicho Interpreter was not available due to a last-minute cancellation. The interpreter scheduled had cancelled for personal reasons. The Member for Monfwi, Mr. Lafferty, rose on a point of privilege. He said the lack of interpretation impeded or prevented him from performing his parliamentary functions as a Member and asked the Speaker to adjourn the proceedings.

The Speaker took the matter under advisement and the proceedings continued. On March 11, 2020, when a Tlicho interpreter was available, the Speaker heard debate on the matter of privilege. Following debate, the Speaker ruled that the matter

did raise a question of privilege. He entertained motions on the ruling, and Motion 5-19(2) was referred to this committee for consideration.

After several in camera meetings on the topic, committee held a public hearing on November 17, 2020. Committee received a presentation from Mr. Batiste Foisy at this hearing. In addition, committee received written submissions from Mr. Jackson Lafferty, Member for Monfwi; the Dene Nation; the Gwich'in Tribal Council; the Yellowknives Dene First Nation; and Ms. Mary Rose Sundberg. These written submissions are included as Appendix 1 of this report. Committee thanks all those who made submissions for sharing their views on this important matter.

#### Official Languages in the Northwest Territories

Since 1990, the Official Languages Act has included Indigenous languages as official languages of the Northwest Territories, giving them equal status within the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Legislative Assembly. The act recognizes the many languages spoken and used by people of the Northwest Territories and is committed to the preservation, development, and enhancement of the Indigenous languages.

The act recognizes 11 official languages: Dene Suline Yatie, Nehiyawewin, English, Francais, Dinju Zhuh K'yu, Inuinnaqtun, Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun, Sahtuot'ine Yati, Dene Zhatie, and Tlicho. Nine of these official languages are Indigenous languages that belong to three different language families: Dene, Inuit, and Algonquian/Cree. The five Dene languages are Dene Suline Yatie, Dinju Zhuh K'yu, Sahtuot'ine Yati, Dene Zhatie, and Tlicho. The three Inuit languages are Inuvialuktun, Inuinnaqtun, and Inuktitut. The one Algonquian/Cree language is Nehiyawewin. The revitalization and use of Indigenous languages are important aspects of reconciliation. In their submission, the Dene Nation states, "The acceptance, use, and respect of Indigenous languages is a critical component to the effective reconciliation between the Dene people and the Government of the Northwest Territories."

The 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly has identified implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a priority. It is included in the Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories for 2019-2023. Article 13 of UNDRIP states:

"Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop, and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems, and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that Indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal, and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means."

In their submission, the Dene Nation states that article 13.2 of UNDRIP "is practically facilitated through the consistent use of translation and interpretation services for all of the territory's official languages in all legislative proceedings."

Mr. Speaker, I would like to turn it over to the honourable Member for Nahendeh to continue the report. Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Member for Nahendeh.

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### Using Official Languages in the Chamber

In ruling on the matter of privilege, Speaker Blake referenced a similar situation that arose in the 11<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly. On October 26, 1989, day 7 of the 5<sup>th</sup> session of the 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly, the Member for Rae-Lac La Martre spoke in an official language for which interpretation was not available. Another Member rose on a point of order. Then-Speaker Nerysoo adjourned the House until such a time as interpretation could be provided. In his decision to adjourn for the day, Speaker Nerysoo noted that the rules of the Legislative Assembly at that time expressly provided that a Member had the "right to speak and be understood in his own language."

Our current rules are silent on the right to use and be understood in our official languages. However, the Official Languages Act provides that everyone has the right to use official languages in the debates and other proceedings of the Legislative Assembly. Committee believes that the right to use official languages in the Assembly, as provided for in the act, necessarily implies the right to be understood by those Members who do not speak the language. In the submissions received by committee, many agreed with this position. The Gwich'in Tribal Council noted, "If what is said is not understood, then speech is essentially equivalent to silence." Further, in their submission, the Dene Nation stated:

"The speakers of these languages deserve the ability to fully participate in the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly as elected representatives of their communities, free from discrimination... the use and recognition of the NWT's Official Languages sets important precedents for the ways

in which language is used and adopted across the territories."

Recognizing the importance of our official languages to the speakers of these languages and the cultures they represent, committee believes that our rules should be amended.

### Recommendation 1

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that the Rules of the Legislative Assembly be amended to clearly state the right to use any official language when speaking in the Assembly, and further, that this right necessarily implies the right to be understood by those Members who do not speak that language. Further, committee recommends that the Rules of the Legislative Assembly be amended to reflect the right of Members to receive interpretation of any official language.

### Recommendation 2

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that the Rules of the Legislative Assembly be amended to clearly state that documents in any official language may be tabled in the Assembly.

### Using Official Languages in Committee Meetings

The public hearing held by committee on November 17, 2020, related to this matter offered simultaneous interpretation in French and Tlicho. In recent years, it had been uncommon to have interpretation for committee meetings, other than for public hearings on legislative or other initiatives, taking place in smaller communities. Rule 92 of the Rules of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly states, "The Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly shall be observed in committees insofar as they are applicable." However, committee recognizes that it is not currently feasible to provide simultaneous interpretation in all official languages at committee meetings. The reasons for this include physical limitations of the Legislative Assembly building and its committee rooms; the number of and availability of qualified interpreters; and the number of committee meetings held, some of which are frequently scheduled on short notice.

Committee recognizes that Members and witnesses appearing before committees have the right to use an official language. Until such a time when it is feasible to provide simultaneous interpretation of all committee proceedings, committee believes interpretation should be offered to Members and witnesses in advance of any meeting. Committee believes that a one-week notice of request for interpretation for any committee proceedings is

reasonable. Committee also believes that efforts to provide appropriate interpretation should be increased for public standing and special committee meetings taking place outside of the capital.

### Recommendation 3

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that simultaneous interpretation of committee proceedings into any official language should be made available to Members or witnesses appearing before committee, with a one-week notice and, further, that the availability of this service should be communicated clearly with Members and any witnesses.

### Recommendation 4

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that the Assembly should increase efforts to provide interpretation into regionally appropriate official languages when standing and special committees hold public meetings in Communities outside of the Capital.

Mr. Speaker, at this time, I would like to turn the report over to the honourable Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Nahendeh. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

**MR. NORN:** Marsi cho, Mr. Speaker.

### Competing Privileges

Parliamentary privilege can be a difficult concept for many people to understand. However, it is a concept fundamental to the smooth and effective functioning of the Legislative Assembly. Parliamentary privilege is the sum of the rights or privileges enjoyed by the Legislative Assembly as an institution and by its Members individually, without which Members could not do their jobs as legislators and which are not possessed by other institutions or individuals. For our Legislative Assembly, Rule 20(1) outlines the privileges of a Member as:

- freedom of speech;
- freedom from arrest in civil matters;
- exemption from jury duty;
- exemption from attendance as a witness in court while the House or a committee is sitting; and
- freedom from obstruction and intimidation in relation to their duties as elected representatives.

The privileges of the House include:

- the power to maintain order and to discipline for breaches of privilege and for contempt of the House. Contempt of the House may include disobedience to its orders, misconduct before it, affronts against its dignity and authority, and any act or omission which impedes or obstructs the House or its Members in the performance of their duties; and
- the right to regulate its internal affairs, including the right to set its own rules and to exercise control over publications.

The point of privilege raised by the Member for Monfwi on March 10, 2020, suggested the lack of interpretation impeded or prevented him from performing his parliamentary functions as a Member. Committee believes this represents an imposition upon the privilege of the Member for Monfwi. The remedy sought by the Member was an adjournment of proceedings. This, it would appear, conflicts with the right of the Assembly to regulate its internal affairs. The Assembly has by law limited its own privileges. Section 1 of the Official Languages Act clearly identifies the "government institution" to which the act applies includes the Legislative Assembly. Further, Section 6 of the act provides that "everyone has the right to use any official language in the debate and proceedings of the Legislative Assembly."

Committee does not recommend any further limits to the privilege of the Assembly. Committee recognizes that the Speaker has the ultimate authority and responsibility to make decisions regarding the proper functioning of the Assembly. However, committee makes the following recommendation.

### Recommendation 5

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that, should a comparable situation arise in the future, the Speaker give strong consideration to a recess in, or adjournment of, proceedings until such a time as adequate interpretation can be provided.

Mr. Speaker, I will say a few words in my language. [English translation not available] Mr. Speaker, continuing back in English.

### Recommendation 6

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that the Speaker and Board of Management develop a rights-based official languages policy for the Legislative Assembly and that the policy come into effect prior to the end of this Assembly.

In keeping with the Official Languages Act, any forthcoming official languages policy must recognize the right to use any official language in the Legislative Assembly. It must also lay out the operational procedures and policies that will be developed and implemented to preserve and enhance the use of our official languages. The policy should highlight the role of the Legislative Assembly as a champion of official languages, including, but not limited to:

- a commitment to provide simultaneous interpretation of House proceedings into all official languages to the greatest extent possible;
- recognition of exceptional circumstances, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which may result in an inability to provide simultaneous interpretation in all official languages;
- recognition of the challenges that can be faced in finding qualified interpreters into all official languages, that the challenges may become more pronounced as the current complement of interpreters retire from the profession, and clear definition of the best practices and reasonable efforts that must be undertaken in trying to do so;
- a plan for a stepwise expansion of official languages services within the Legislative Assembly;
- a plan to incorporate interpreters and official languages services into the orientation program for Members of future Legislative Assemblies;
- a plan to engage interpreters in regular and ongoing training on the proceedings of and terminology specific to the Legislative Assembly;
- a plan to seek regular feedback from interpreters and speakers of our official languages on the quality of interpretation services provided;
- a plan to develop and implement training for remote interpretation, which would allow interpreters to provide effective services from their home communities;
- a plan to standardize the hiring practices and contracts for interpreters employed by the Legislative Assembly;
- a stepwise plan to make the majority of Legislative Assembly publications available in all official languages, beginning with the Orders of the Day and the Votes and Proceedings;

- a plan to make translation services in all official languages available to Members of the Legislative Assembly; and
- a plan to allow the inclusion of all official languages other than English into Hansard by allowing Members of the Legislative to submit typed text of any statement made in the Assembly in any official language, which is consistent with this committee's recommendations in its Report on Remote Sitings.

Further, any official languages policy should be available on the Legislative Assembly website in all official languages. Committee recognizes that a thorough official languages policy is a significant undertaking and it may not be possible to fully implement all aspects of such a policy during the life of this Assembly. Committee also recognizes that, as technologies evolve, new issues raised, and new solutions identified, it will be necessary to update any forthcoming official languages policy. To that end, committee envisions an official languages policy that will be regularly updated and shared with the public and future committees.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I would like to turn the report over to my colleague for Nunakput.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you. Member for Nunakput.

**MR. JACOBSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### Operational Changes

In addition to the development of an official languages policy, committee believes operational changes should be considered at the Legislative Assembly to improve the delivery of official language services. Since 2019, the Legislative Assembly has benefited from an increased budget related to official languages, such as:

- Interpretation services were extended from a two-hour period from the start of a sitting day to full-day coverage;
- Facilities were upgraded to allow the number of official languages being interpreted on a daily basis to be increased;
- Broadcasting in official languages other than English was increased;
- YouTube channels were created to share proceedings in interpreted official languages; and
- Some professional development for interpreters has been introduced.

Committee recognizes that, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it is not currently possible to provide simultaneous interpretation of proceedings into all official languages due to the physical and technological limitations of the Legislative Assembly. Committee appreciates the ongoing efforts to provide simultaneous interpretation into the greatest possible number of official languages and encourages the Assembly to continue these efforts.

Following the pandemic, or when it is possible to overcome the current physical and technical limitations faced by the Assembly, committee encourages full simultaneous interpretation of House proceedings into all official languages where:

- interpretation is provided for the entire sitting day;
- a minimum of two interpreters should be scheduled to provide service in each official language, in keeping with best practices;
- to the greatest degree possible, the Assembly should hire interpreters from multiple communities to ensure that regional dialects of official languages are adequately represented in the Assembly; and
- efforts should be undertaken to identify on-call interpreters who are able to provide service on short notice if there is an unexpected cancellation.

As recommended in the Languages Commissioner's special report, this committee believes there would be value in recording statistics regarding the use of official languages in the Assembly. Further, committee believes these statistics should be incorporated into future annual reports of the Legislative Assembly. Statistics to be recorded may include:

- the number of translation and interpretation requests made by Members of the Legislative Assembly and turnaround time for this work;
- the number of Assembly documents translated into official languages;
- the number of committee meetings for which interpretation is provided;
- the number of hours of House proceedings interpreted into each official language as well as the total number of hours of interpreted proceedings; and
- the number of Ministers' and Members' statements made in an official language other than English.

Prior to the public hearing of November 17, 2020, committee distributed a stakeholder letter seeking input on this matter. Attached to this letter was an active offer to provide the letter in any official language. Committee believes that the Legislative Assembly should develop an active offer page, making use of the appropriate spelling of each language, and it should be included with the following documents:

- Votes and Proceedings;
- Rules of the Legislative Assembly;
- Code of Conduct for Members of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly;
- News releases;
- Annual reports and other reports of the Legislative Assembly; and
- Committee reports.

The active offer should also feature prominently on the Legislative Assembly website. In addition, committee believes the Legislative Assembly should strive to produce the Votes and Proceedings, the official record of the Assembly and Committee of the Whole, in all official languages.

During the public hearing, Mr. Batiste Foisy remarked on the inability of the Legislative Assembly to provide interpreted audio in a timely manner, which can impact the ability of non-English media in reporting on the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly. Committee understands that this shortcoming is, for the most part, due to limitations of the hardware currently in use. In the longer term, committee believes that the Legislative Assembly should consider the official languages requirements when upgrading audio and video equipment related to broadcasting, web streaming, and in-house audio systems.

#### **Recommendation 7**

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that the above suggestions be investigated by the Office of the Speaker, the Board of Management, and the Office of the Clerk in an effort to make immediate improvements in the provision of official languages services. Further, if any of these suggestions are found not be feasible at present, committee recommends that a plan to realize these outcomes be included in the official languages policy.

Mr. Speaker, I hand it over to our committee chair from Frame Lake. Thank you.



**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Nunakput. Members, before we proceed, I think our interpreters are having a little difficulty with how fast we're reading here, so just a reminder. Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President.

### Review of the Official Languages Act

In their written submissions, the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and Ms. Mary Rose Sundberg indicated a need to reinstate interpreter and translator training programs. Both submissions advocate for a decentralized approach to providing this training that will allow for accreditation in the field. Ms. Mary Rose Sundberg indicated a need for the Government of the Northwest Territories to re-open a languages bureau. Committee believes these are issues worthy of consideration but recognizes these issues are beyond the scope of this review.

### Recommendation 8

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that the Standing Committee on Government Operations consider the issues of interpreter and translator training and accreditation and the possibility of a future Government of the Northwest Territories languages bureau in the context of its review of the Official Languages Act.

### CONCLUSION

[Translation] The committee finds the lack of interpretation in Tlicho on March 10, 2020, impeded or prevented the Member for Monfwi from performing his parliamentary functions as a Member. The committee has made recommendations that it believes will assist the Assembly in avoiding any similar situation in the future.

Committee thanks Mr. Batiste Foisy for appearing at the public hearing on November 17, 2020, and thanks Mr. Jackson Lafferty, Member for Monfwi; Dene Nation; Gwich'in Tribal Council; Yellowknives Dene First Nation; and Ms. Mary Rose Sundberg for their written submissions on this matter. This concludes the committee's report on its review of Motion 5-19(2): Referral of Point of Privilege Raised by Member for Monfwi on March 10, 2020. [Translation ends]

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Frame Lake, and thank you to the committee for all the work that they have done. Member for Frame Lake.

MOTION TO RECEIVE COMMITTEE REPORT 8-19(2) AND MOVE INTO COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE, CARRIED

**MR. O'REILLY:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Nahendeh, that Committee Report 8-19(2): Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures Report on Motion 5-19(2): Referral of Point of Privilege Raised by Member for Monfwi on March 10, 2020, be received by the Assembly and moved into Committee of the Whole for further consideration. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. 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? Any abstentions?

---Carried

The report will be moved into Committee of the Whole. Thank you. Reports of standing and special committees. Item 8, returns to oral questions. Item 9, acknowledgements. Item 10, oral questions. Member for Thebacha.

### Oral Questions

QUESTION 521-19(2):  
MIDWIFERY

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2017, the Department of Health and Social Services released a report titled NWT Midwifery Stakeholder Engagement. The report is 75 pages long, and it concludes with a list of ten recommendations for the Government of the Northwest Territories. In relation to recommendations 1 through 5, can the Health Minister tell us when the Department of Health and Social Services will fund the additional positions that are required to strengthen and expand midwifery in the NWT? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Member Health and Social Services.

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are planning for the expansion of the midwifery program in a number of areas. Specifically in Hay River, there is the beginning of engagement with community, starting with Fort Resolution and then the communities of the Deh Cho to consult people on what they consider to be the most appropriate ways to extend midwifery care to families there. There are also preliminary discussions taking place between NTHSSA and the Tlicho Community Services Agency around the best ways to expand access to midwifery care for families in Behchoko. There is also, as of a year ago, a new territorial midwifery manager who is working at the territorial level looking at how services can be expanded, and

a second position will be accompanying that initial one. The anticipated hiring date is the fall of this year. Thank you.

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Could the Minister tell us when the Department of Health and Social Services will fulfill all ten recommendations found within the 2017 Midwifery Stakeholder Engagement?

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Thank you to the Member for that question. What we have done to date with that report is completed five out of ten recommendations. To follow up on the information that I just provided, we will commit to providing an action item update on all ten recommendations in June of this year.

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Can the Minister tell us when the Department of Health and Social Services will begin to undertake the responsibility of ensuring that all families and communities have full and equal access to midwifery services in the NWT?

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** We recognize that increased access to midwifery services will not only enhance perinatal services for NWT residents and improve outcomes for mothers and babies but also strengthen the delivery of culturally sensitive based primary care in our health system. We are very interested in this, and we have taken the actions that I have referenced. We do, however, require an additional \$2 million to implement phases 2 and 3 of the midwifery recommendations, and that money does not exist in our budget at this time.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister provide us with any updates or comments on the upcoming plans for the expansion of the midwifery program in the NWT? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Just to recap, there is planning going on at the territorial level with the Hay River Health and Social Services authority and with the Tlicho Community Services Agency to expand the midwifery program, but to go from planning to hiring, we need \$2 million. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 522-19(2):  
STIMULUS FUNDING FOR SMALL REMOTE  
COMMUNITIES

**MR. JACOBSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, I have questions for Madam Premier. I know that the government has a lot of programs and services designed through different programs, through the communities. Since COVID hit, has Cabinet or the

Premier ever thought about talking to the hamlet councils in the small communities, remote communities, about giving them a funding package other than what they normally would say? If the community asked for something, they would say, "Use your O and M," or, "Use your gas tax money; we're not going to give you nothing." However, since COVID hit, everything has been stretched out. Is there any possible way that the government could give a stimulus package to the hamlets across the territory, especially in my riding of Nunakput? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Nunakput. Honourable Premier.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Mr. Speaker, I think that would be a question best asked to the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Honourable Premier. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

**HON. PAULIE CHINNA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year, Municipal and Community Affairs did have a disbursement out to the communities, all 33, in response to COVID. Also, we did have additional funding that was allocated to the smaller communities for sport and recreation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. JACOBSON:** Good news. I am here to ask for some more money on behalf of the communities. You know our communities are so isolated right now due to the COVID pandemic. Nobody can travel, a lot of stress on the families because nobody is going out and visiting or sharing or anything. I am just wondering where we are at. Before Christmas, I asked the Premier: were we able to get Chromebooks and iPads given out to ECE to give to the libraries, I guess, to give it to the adults or the elders for sign-out, say give 15 iPads or Chromebooks into the libraries in each community? I am just wondering where we are with that.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** I think that is a question best deferred to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Madam Premier. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to our generous Premier for allowing the Member to ask questions across the board. The Member is correct. The Assembly did approve funds for Chromebooks and turbo sticks to be distributed across the territory. Many of those have gone out. I am not exactly sure how many have gone out, but they are being distributed to students who for whatever reason have to participate in

distanced learning, so not every student gets one. For example, though, in Fort Liard, when the school shut down, within a week, ECE and the school board were able, with the help of Finance, to deploy Chromebooks and turbo sticks to those who needed them. That is the status of that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**MR. JACOBSON:** Again, thank you, Minister, for getting me those Chromebooks and the turbo sticks we need. The thing is, the elders, you go to the library for instance in Tuktoyaktuk, you can go and sign it out. Not everybody has the luxury of having that iPad or any kind of communication. Their communication is CBC on TV at 6:00 or the radio. I am just wondering why, like if it's possible for the government to look at things such as, once COVID, for example, will stop using the power limiters and evicting people. Right now, I mean, two different lines of questioning: if we were able to stop this right now during the pandemic again, is it possible to do that, since I am all over the map right now with that? I need that to stop: no evictions, no more limiters.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** I would like to respectfully ask that the Member refrain from asking questions all over and ask the questions to the proper Ministers.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Honourable Premier. Yes, Member, please stick to the first line of questions.

**MR. JACOBSON:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker. All 33 communities are in need of more funding, stimulus package, because we have been hurting. They are stretching out our local community governments. Our local community governments need help. Is the Premier and committee or Cabinet ready to help them? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** The first question was for the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, and that question is best answered by that Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Honourable Premier. Minister of MACA.

**HON. PAULIE CHINNA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The department continues to support the smaller communities and all municipalities throughout the territory. Presently, one of the major activities that we are having is the emergency management plans that we are working with with the COVID secretariat, as well. However, I also wanted to highlight the allocation of funding that was allocated to the smaller communities. In all, the federal government had allocated \$1.53 million for Municipal and Community Affairs for the smaller communities, and, for each of the communities,

there was an amount of \$19,000, depending on what the communities had put forward. They had to work with the department in order to display the amount of funding that they were going to require for their specific community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member Monfwi.

QUESTION 523-19(2):

REPLACEMENT OF CHIEF BRUNEAU SCHOOL

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Masi, Mr. Speaker. [Translation] Today, when I spoke on my Member's statement about the school, Chief Jimmy Bruneau school, we know that it has been 26 years since the renovation, and then, that school that we had, it has been 50 years. [Translation ends] [Microphone turned off] ...the community of Behchoko. I would like to ask the question to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment about the potential capital plans for the new school. Mr. Speaker, my first question is: what is the latest update on the discussion of a new Chief Jimmy Bruneau school in Behchoko? Masi, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year, I met with the Tlicho Government in Edzo, in Chief Jimmy Bruneau school, actually, and the Member was a guest at that meeting, as well. That is where the Tlicho Government made clear that they would not entertain the idea of a retrofit of Chief Jimmy Bruneau school in Edzo; they wanted a new build in Rae. Based on that, I said, "We do not have a budget for that, but if that is what you want, we can try to work together, go approach the federal government, and see if perhaps they can provide some of the funds to cover that cost difference, which is going to be significant."

Since that happened, there was another agreement made between the Tlicho Government and the GNWT regarding infrastructure projects, and so the work that was being done specifically about this school has been rolled into that. I think it was about a month ago now, was the last meeting. They are just finalizing some terms of reference, and we will go forward from there. The plan is still to try to seek funds in order to build a new school in Rae because that is what was communicated to us as the desire from the Tlicho Government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. LAFFERTY:** [Translation] About this, people are asking me now about the new school to be built. If that is the case, where will it be, in Edzo or in Behchoko? Because we know we have a lot of parents who are very concerned because this is a

major project. This is my question to the Minister of Education. [Translation ends] It really should be up to the Behchoko residents to decide. There needs to be a survey in the community to get their input on this new location. Has a survey been contemplated and considered by this department, by this Minister, as well?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** We are approaching this as a government-to-government project, and it is the Tlicho Government who have stated where on their land they want the school to be built. It's not up to ECE to do a survey of the community in that sense. I am not sure what the Tlicho Government has undertaken in terms of community consultation. Where we would be involved with consulting the community is when there is a final decision on where to build the school.

There is a lot of community engagement about what that school should look like, right down to the materials that are used. Schools are very personal to communities, and so we always want to final product to reflect community desires in that sense. However, in terms of the location, that is not the decision that we are making; that is the one that is being suggested by the Tlicho Government. I will also point out that this is all contingent on getting federal money in order to build this school in Rae.

**MR. LAFFERTY:** I am glad the Minister is considering also highlighting the importance of community engagement. It's very important to get that input from the general public of Behchoko on this particular new school; how it's going to be structured; how it's going to look; and obviously, where it's going to be located, as well, because I'm getting calls on that. I am sure my leadership will get calls and also the department, too. We have to keep in mind that the funding has been identified through GNWT, obviously, with the assistance of the federal government. The decision lies here, so that is why I am asking the Minister.

Anyways, moving onto the next question because this will be an ongoing discussion: when can we predict to see, obviously, we always talk about shovels in the ground for the new Chief Jimmy Bruneau School? This is not a new concept, and we have been discussing this project for some time now. Enough talking. Let's put this project into action. Where is that? We need it. When is that going to be happening?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** If everything goes smooth, it is still a few years out. This is a big project if it is a new build, and so we would be looking at the completion of construction by 2025.

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

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Masi, Mr. Speaker. The Minister touched on federal engagement. I am assuming that federal has been approached because the chief, my leadership, last year, we met, and there was a clear direction to the Minister that we need this to happen, a new school replacement. Has the department reached out to the federal government, and what is the status on that? 2025, by the time we reach that, Mr. Speaker, that is the next four years. That is going to be well over 30 years since the last renovation, and that school is deteriorating as we speak. That will be over 60 years of age for our school. What's the latest status on the federal engagement, Mr. Speaker? Masi.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** We were moving forward with this, and in October, there was a decision made to move the coordination of federal engagement from the project's specific working group that I mentioned earlier to the infrastructure cooperation agreement group that is part of the larger infrastructure agreement between the GNWT and the Tlicho. That has set us back a little bit, so we are still working on finalizing the terms of reference. Once that happens, then we can move forward. In that time, there has been work done to identify: who do we approach; what pots of money are available and that type of work? It is not like we are sitting idle, but we are not in the position yet to do the full-on engagement. I look forward to that happening relatively soon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 524-19(2):  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES POWER  
CORPORATION BOARD

**MS. SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister responsible for NTPC. During this sitting, will the Minister be able to table the terms of reference or other direction provided to the deputy ministers for the development of the NTPC governance option? If not, why?

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation.

**HON. DIANE ARCHIE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The GNWT is currently undertaking a review of the NTPC governance as structured, including how to improve the accountability of the corporation to the GNWT as well as the Legislative Assembly. The GNWT is currently developing a terms of reference for this review. One of the things we would like to do before we finalize this document is to be able to sit down with the Standing Committee on Government Operations to seek some of the committee's input. I will commit to sharing this draft

document with Members prior to the conclusion of this sitting of this Legislative Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. SEMMLER:** I would like to ask the Minister if that work will be completed during this sitting and be able to have a date of when we should be expecting that work.

**HON. DIANE ARCHIE:** I acknowledge that the work on the governance options for Power Corporation has proceeded much more slowly than any of us would expect or would like. We emerge from a particularly challenging than any other would like with a year of COVID. We are considering approaches to better resource this important work, so it can be addressed in a timelier manner. Again, Mr. Speaker, I commit to providing an update to Members along with the draft terms of reference document as previously mentioned.

**MS. SEMMLER:** The Minister has mentioned that it has taken a long time to get here, and she has said, just to be clear, that they are going to be looking for assistance to finish this work. Has this been started? Has the Minister's department or the deputy ministers of this board reached out and gotten help to develop this governance model option?

**HON. DIANE ARCHIE:** While the board will be engaged through this process, it is important to identify that the board is not undertaking the review itself. It just wouldn't make sense. It wouldn't even be appropriate for a public board to be able to undertake review of its own governance structure. The review will be held by a public service, engaging experts as needed, giving advice to myself as Minister responsible for NWT Power Corporation.

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

**MS. SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the Minister if they can get an arm's-length review so we are not having public servants review the NTPC board structure and governance so that we get some good options and that they're not going to be -- like I said in my Member's statement, they need to be arm's length from the government. Please, I would direct, not direct but ask the Minister to commit to looking outside the public service to do this review. Thank you.

**HON. DIANE ARCHIE:** As I mentioned earlier, we are committed to engaging the committee as this work advances. The next step is to be able to meet with Standing Committee on Government Operations, offer a briefing, seek input on this review, and perhaps some of the input from the standing committee will be able to help provide

some directions on how we proceed with the governance review. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 525-19(2):  
DIABETES PROGRAMS IN SMALL  
COMMUNITIES

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Following up to my Member's statement regarding the lack of diabetes programs in smaller health centres and isolated communities: the Minister of Health and Social Services is tasked with ensuring the residents receive top-notch healthcare, even for the smaller communities. Can the Minister look into her department to see if they offer diabetes programs in the smaller health centres and in the isolated communities? Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Deh Cho. Minister of Health and Social Services.

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. What I can say is that community health nurses, nurse practitioners, and family physicians all provide diabetes care, and it is available in every community in the Northwest Territories. There is also specialized support that is available at Stanton from internal medicine specialists who are located here in Yellowknife.

It is very important to us as a department that we ensure that all primary care providers, so that would be community health nurses, nurse practitioners and so on, have strong core skills to provide appropriate care to diabetics. Obviously, this is a major disease in our territory and very debilitating. We want to make sure that people have access to excellent care wherever they live.

There is a clinic that takes in people who are newly diagnosed with diabetes to try and help them understand their condition and how to manage it. This is located in Edmonton, and it is an Indigenous program. It presents a culturally safe situation but, of course, enrolment is down because people don't want to go to Edmonton during COVID. There is a delay in sending people down to the special clinic for those who are newly diagnosed, but that doesn't take away from the fact that care is available to them in every community here. Thank you.

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** I thank the Minister for that. Mr. Speaker, my own experience at my local health centre goes like this: I go in for bloodwork and wait eons. I then make an appointment to see another nurse. This is a totally different nurse. She states that there is no record of any blood being taken, so she takes more blood. I don't hear or have any follow-up notice, so I go in again to see a different

nurse. This is a third different nurse in our health centre. She states there is no record of any blood drawn nor anything sent out. At this point, I am just about ready to faint.

I don't believe they take people with diabetes seriously, and this is a serious detriment to providing the best healthcare that the department can provide. In all seriousness, can the Minister have her department follow up with the health centres to determine what process is being implemented once bloodwork has been drawn as these samples have to be sent out for analysis?

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** The process is this: the blood is drawn in the community the person is in, and it is then sent to Stanton lab for processing. The reports are then sent back to the community through electronic medical records, and electronic medical records has instituted a set of rules which provide the nurse in charge or the primary caregiver in the community with a flag that says the lab results are back and that they are out of range and that attention needs to be paid with a follow-up appointment. It shouldn't matter who the nurse actually is in the given situation.

The information is entered into the electronic medical records, and then, as I say, there is this flag that appears that says they need to follow up with the person whose blood was taken. Then, of course, if the values were out of range, they would book a follow-up appointment and make sure that they are in contact with the patient to help him or her manage their condition. At the moment, I feel that we are in a situation where, even though staff changes in small community health centres, we, in fact, have a system that will carry diabetics through.

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** I know everything looks good when it's written on paper, and in this situation, that's all it is. I spoke to the nurse practitioner that saw me that day, and they said that they don't have a program for diabetics in the health centres in my community. I would really like the Minister to have her department really look into the situation, maybe firsthand.

Mr. Speaker, the lives of our diabetic residents lay in the balance of effective diabetes treatment programs. We have to give it the weight it so deserves to ensure good positive health outcomes for our people, especially the people in the smaller communities and isolated communities. Can the Minister commit to provide the resources to ensure an effective diabetes program for all of the small communities of the Northwest Territories, especially in Fort Providence?

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** I invite the Member to submit a request to the department to look into his case in particular and to sign a consent form so that the

information can be shared with me, and then with him, so that we understand exactly what's going on there. We are confident that our diabetic care is good in every community. No doubt we could be better.

To that end, we are instituting, as you may know, primary healthcare reform. This has a special focus on chronic conditions. It is being rolled out throughout the NWT. It was started last August, moving into the Deh Cho and Yellowknife regions in December, and then onwards to the other regions of the NWT. What primary healthcare reform does is ensure that there is this continuity of care among different practitioners. Between that and the flags on the electronic medical records, I feel confident that we can stay on top of the situation diabetics are in in the small communities.

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

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I don't know why I need to sign a consent form; I'm already giving my complaint to the Minister. We don't have a diabetic program in my community and, I don't believe, in all of the communities. I would like her to have her department investigate the health centre. They drew blood from me twice. Where did it go? I don't have any results back yet, nothing. I don't even have a program. I told you I was in a program in Hay River. It was a very well laid out program. In my community, I don't have that. This is a debilitating disease that could get out of hand if we don't have any care in our communities. That's more just a comment, Mr. Speaker. Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Deh Cho. Would the Minister like to take that as a comment? Oral questions. Member for Great Slave.

#### QUESTION 526-19(2): MEDICAL DETOXIFICATION SERVICES

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned in my statement, when a patient indicates they want to enter treatment, they often must be medically detoxed prior to being sent South for treatment or going on the land. Can the Minister explain the process for receiving medical detox in the Northwest Territories and what she is doing to address the barriers to accessing it? Thank you.

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

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All of the treatment facilities that we have contracts with do offer detox, either on site or through a partnership with a local detox facility. In most cases, individuals do need to detox before they can

start attending treatment. There are several options, though, in addition to doing the detox on site at the facility in which they are going to do their addictions treatment. It's possible to detox in one of the NWT hospitals. That decision is made on a case-by-case basis with a physician referral that can be obtained through the local health practitioner, whether that's in a large centre or a smaller one. The detox is, as the Member has said, a very important step in addictions-based treatment or on-the-land treatment or any kind of treatment, because alcohol dependency creates a physical dependency, as well, and the effects of withdrawing have to be managed properly in a medical setting. Thank you.

**MS. NOKLEBY:** I respectfully disagree with the Minister. My contacts tell me that that is not the case, and it is very difficult, as I explained in my statement last night, getting somebody in for medical detox. Moving on, we have one of the highest rates of mental health issues for youth in Canada, yet we still don't have a child and adolescent psychiatric unit. Can the Minister tell me if such a unit is currently being planned, and if so, could she include timelines? If not, can the Minister explain why we are not ensuring adequate facilities for our most vulnerable?

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** I would like to begin by highlighting that in-patient mental healthcare is not best practice for children and youth. It's not a good idea to put them in a hospital in an in-patient setting unless that's a last resort. Supporting youth, rather, in the community is what we consider to be the best practice at this point, and it's done through the child and youth care counsellors, who are available in the school and who we have spoken about quite often in this House, and also by the child and youth mental health coordinator at Stanton hospital.

The coordinator is leading a number of key initiatives to improve our approach to caring for children and youth with mental health needs, and some examples are: working with the Stanton Territorial Pediatric In-patient Unit to develop in-patient psychiatric admission processes and programming for youth who do need this service; working with the Stanton team to build care pathways, therapeutic resources, after-care, and staff capacity for caring for this population; supporting health centre staff across the territory with mental health systems navigation and building their skill sets to care for children and youth in need of mental health services; and leading the implementation of the Northwest Territories' partnership with the Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto to improve access to specialized child psychiatric services across our regions and communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. NOKLEBY:** I would also state that I think a psychiatric unit doesn't necessarily always mean a facility or a building, but perhaps a unit made up of dedicated professionals and staff to look after children and adolescents specifically. I am grateful to hear that the Minister does have people looking toward improving these supports. Last, I would just like to know if the Minister is prepared to first acknowledge then act to address the growing medical crisis we are facing when it comes to supporting our people who are struggling with mental health and addictions. When the Minister responds to ask me where to prove that we're in a crisis to my questions, then I would state back that even one person falling through the cracks is a crisis.

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Yes, I recognize the Member and I don't agree on this. She has been soliciting horror stories on Facebook and, apparently, has been very gratified with that. What we know from the Canadian Institute for Health Information is that there isn't a significant change in the number of hospitalizations, so it is not correct to characterize it as a crisis. We do know that mental health is a significant issue in this territory. We invest in it every year. We know that the issues are complex, that they are rooted in social determinants of health and, in some cases, specifically in our shameful legacy of colonization and residential schools. We continue to provide, through a number of avenues which I have made the Member aware of, support to people who have mental health issues, so that they can recover and live their best lives.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to state that I think it's disgusting that the Minister would characterize my wanting to advocate for my constituents and residents of this territory as collecting horror stories that I find gratifying. I find it disgusting, and I find it disgusting that the Minister does not accept that she is in the middle of a crisis and that the pandemic is only accelerating that crisis. If she is going to continue to deny the problem, we aren't going to see any solutions, and we are only going to see things get worse. I'm just going to leave it at that. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Great Slave. I'll take that as a comment.

#### POINT OF ORDER

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** [Microphone turned off] ...that matter on a point of order. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I will take that under advisement and get back to the House. Just to be clear, I would like to ask what your point of order is.

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** My point of order is that the Member was impugning motives to me which are not valid. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. I will take this under advisement, because usually we offer a debate. We will get back to this tomorrow, hopefully. I will report back tomorrow on my decision and offer debate at that time. Thank you. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

QUESTION 527-19(2):  
MINIMUM WAGE AND TOP-UP PROGRAM

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. I will be the first to admit that my Internet skills are not the greatest, but I can't seem to find anything about the mysterious minimum wage committee on any GNWT website. Nothing can be found about its mandate, composition, or the 2014 and 2018 reports. Can the Minister explain the nearly total absence of public information on the minimum wage committee? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier, I think the Member said that, apparently, there is a mysterious minimum wage committee. I can assure the Member that it's not "apparently." It does, in fact, exist. He might recall it from the half-dozen times I have mentioned it in this House. Google, I'm sure, checks Hansard, as well, and so it probably came up with explanations of this committee that I've given in the past. It is a committee made up of two members of industry, two members of labour, and a member representing an NGO, and they meet every two years to discuss potential changes to the minimum wage, and they provide the Minister of the day with three options and their rationale.

This is not a public document, as it is a recommendation made to a member of the Executive Council, but in respect to the terms of reference and more information like that, I appreciate that the Member did bring this to our attention. I don't want there to be any mystery around this, so we will provide some more information on the website so that, next time the Member Googles it, it will be very clear and front and centre. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I wish all mysteries could be solved as easily as the Minister says, but I do appreciate his efforts to try to bring some greater transparency on this. When I raised the questions about the NWT Wage Top-up Program and the relationship to the

minimum wage, the Minister of Finance had mentioned that the minimum wage committee is working away on this, but can the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment briefly describe what this committee is doing and the schedule for increasing the minimum wage?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** As I stated, the committee met a number of times. They put together a report. I received that report. I shared that report before Christmas with the Standing Committee on Social Development. I received feedback from the Standing Committee on Social Development in January, I believe, and I am now considering options going forward. The Wage Top-up Program administered by Finance is time-limited. I believe the Minister stated yesterday that it ends on February 28<sup>th</sup>, and so I consider things like that. I consider the fact that we are in a pandemic. Our borders are closed, and the majority of those earning minimum wage are in the hardest-hit sectors of our economy; servers, people like that. There is a lot to consider here, and I am having conversations with my Cabinet colleagues. I am happy to have more conversations with Members, and I will make a determination at some point in the coming weeks, I imagine, just so that everyone is aware of what is happening and has plenty of heads up.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I want to thank the Minister for continuing to shed light on the minimum wage committee and its work. Since April 1, 2020, the effective minimum wage for the NWT has been basically \$18 an hour through the Wage Top-up Program, and this has now been taken up by about 9 percent of the total NWT labour force. This program is not going to go on forever, as the Minister said, but it also a clear indication of how ridiculously low our minimum wage actually is. Can the Minister tell us whether it is his intention to roll back the effective minimum wage for 9 percent of our workforce to something less than \$18 an hour?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** I don't have control over anything called an "effective minimum wage." In the Employment Standards Act, there is a minimum wage which is the minimum amount that an employer can legally pay. Right now, that's \$13.46, and there are options in front of me to either keep it static or potentially increase it, but I am not rolling anything back. I can promise that it won't go down to \$13 or \$12 an hour. It won't go back to \$6.50, which is what I was making when I was in high school. I can guarantee the Member that.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. When I was in high school, I was getting \$1.25 an hour, but, look, this is irrelevant. The fact is that



people are now getting \$20 an hour through the wage top-up program, and that \$20 an hour is going to get rolled back when this program ends. We are not going to increase the minimum wage to \$18 an hour. People are going to have their wages rolled back. That is the fact of it. Our minimum wage and even the wage top-up program did not provide a living wage of around \$24 an hour for people living in Inuvik, Hay River, or Yellowknife, let alone the smaller communities. Can the Minister explain how we can ever lift people out of poverty when 9 percent of our labour force makes the minimum wage, which does not even get close to a living wage? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** It's probably the biggest question I have ever been asked. It's multifaceted. It's not just mandating a minimum wage of a certain amount. If I were to mandate a minimum wage of a living wage, \$25 an hour, we would be putting people out of business and the cost of goods would be going up because the cost of business goes up, so we would need a new living wage. What we need is a cross-government approach. There has been a lot of talk about guaranteed basic income in this House. British Columbia just looked at this. They undertook a study. It took two years. They had an independent commission. They looked at 40 different reports. What conclusion did they come to when the report was released just last month? They said that a guaranteed basic income probably is not going to solve all the issues. What you need are targeted supports. You need to deal with people if they have addictions issues. You need to make sure that there are jobs for people to have. You need to make sure people can be trained. You need to make sure people have housing.

Just throwing money at a problem, as simple as it seems, and that is probably the allure of it, it does not necessarily mean that it works. We are undertaking a review of the Income Assistance Program to ensure that we are helping people get over that welfare wall, get out of poverty. We are undertaking a review of the Student Financial Assistance Act to see if there are barriers to people getting training. We are looking at our apprentice programs and how we support businesses and people who want to become journey-persons, to see if we can help facilitate that.

I have 11 minutes left, and I am sure I can fill the entire 11 minutes, but I will leave it at that. There is a lot going on, Mr. Speaker. Everything we do here, everything we do in this Assembly, is to get people out of poverty; it's to improve the lives of our residents. It does not lie solely on myself as Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, and it certainly is not tied solely to the minimum wage. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 528-19(2):  
INTEGRATED CASE MANAGEMENT

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am just not having a great day. There we go. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Justice in regard to the integrated case management team. As you heard in my statement today, people cannot just walk into integrated case management and self-refer. They have to be referred by a department, so I am asking the Minister to please create a process where NWT residents can self-refer to ICM. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Full disclosure: I have had a number of conversations with the Member about this. I know she is very passionate about it, and I understand why. As MLAs, we all deal with our constituents, and we all feel their frustration when they cannot get services that they want to access.

Integrated case management has been a very successful program to help individuals with a lot of needs, who access a lot of different departments. It has been able to help them find the help that they need. Right now, there are around 95 clients who have pathfinders, as they are called, assigned to them, but there is also a large waiting list. Even without self-referral, we have a very large wait list. If there was self-referral, it would then put more burden on the ICM program to sift through those people to see, "Okay. Who do we take next?" At least with the process as it is, that filtering process is done.

That is not to say that everyone who should be referred has been referred, but we are trying to do better. While we are not looking at a self-referral model, we are doing a lot of the things that the Member has already spoken about in terms of making it easier to access programs as they are as opposed to having somebody walk with you while you access them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. CLEVELAND:** I think that, given the large wait list of ICM and if you even take a look at the House business papers of what people are choosing to talk about these days, this is a big problem and this is a big problem that needs our attention. When NWT residents cannot find doors to open to get services, that is a huge problem. It is our job to open those doors for them and to fix this system so that it actually works for the people of the Northwest Territories. I have not been very kind to the Minister, I feel, on this subject matter. I have

persistently come back to him on this one. I feel that just simply saying that people cannot refer to ICM, just strictly, it's not good enough. I do not think that ICM, given its huge success, is a place where people should be finding a dead end, and so if the Minister cannot commit at this point in time to allowing people to self-refer to ICM, will the Minister create a process so that nobody finds a dead end at ICM?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** There was a recent review of integrated case management done. From that, there were a number of recommendations, a number of very good recommendations, and we are moving forward with implementing some of those. However, those alone will not solve the Member's concerns. The big issue is that, when one of her constituents attends a single office, they are not then being referred to perhaps other services that they could be; they are not getting the type of assistance in that moment that perhaps would help them along and help them help themselves. Not everyone needs a pathfinder with them, but perhaps some people need a different interaction when they interact with any front-line worker, especially when it's related to poverty or addictions or things like that.

There is a lot of research that shows that it is the interactions they have with the front-line workers that can solve a lot of those issues without referring someone to ICM. If we change that, how people interact and what is expected of employees when they are presented with certain situations, then we can go a long way to alleviating some of these concerns. That really is a client-centred focus when it comes to service. I want to assure the Member that ICM is not the end-all and be-all, but it is part of a larger transformation that is currently happening in the GNWT, and that is integrated service delivery.

What that is is a very client-centred model of providing programs and services. It starts with a focus on the individual. It requires change within the organization, a culture change, and then involves governance changes, as well, in how we develop policies, how we develop legislation. It's really more of a long-term goal, but I want to assure the Member that it is something that is happening and that a lot of people are very committed to.

**MS. CLEVELAND:** I appreciate that ICM is not the be-all and end-all, and I was trying to hopefully pick up a yes in the Minister's response to me. My point being that, yes, ICM is not the be-all, end-all, but ICM cannot join the team of dead ends within the GNWT. ICM needs to have a solution for people who show up at the door and are asking for help. If somebody comes to the Government of the Northwest Territories asking for help, the government needs to say, "Yes." The government

does not need to say, "You are at the wrong door. Try another door." What I am asking the Minister today is: will he turn ICM into a real door instead of a fake one, for people who do not have government referral?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** To call ICM a fake door is really doing a disservice to the work that has been done by that team. They have helped a lot of people. The reason the Member is advocating for it is because they have helped so many people. However, they can only do so much, and to add another element, it's just not possible at this time.

That being said, I get what the Member is saying. When someone shows up, what do we do? Ideally, they should be going to the service they need, but for whatever reason, they might show up at ICM. I can look into that and have a discussion again, another one of our offline discussions with the Member. I just want her to be assured that this is something that we take very seriously. It's a passion project of mine. I can't say that when I got another department, I thought, "Oh great. I have so much time to fill, another department." But when I really started getting into integrated service delivery and ICM, I really did get excited because it is one of the most important things I think this government is doing.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Minister's efforts and the Minister's time, and I can definitely say the Minister has given me a lot of time on this topic. I can also say that my intent is not to downplay the work that ICM does. ICM is incredibly effective at the work that they do, but I just believe that client service for the people of the Northwest Territories should not be held within one, small, four-person division within Justice. It really is: the entire government needs to learn from ICM and needs to be able to be more like, "Let's all be more like ICM." Does the Minister commit to helping me identify and open some dead ends in other government departments so that we can work through this together a little bit quicker because I am slightly impatient? Thank you.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** I don't think I can stop the Member from sending me email requests and coming to my office and chatting about this. She can keep bringing those issues to us, and I will keep trying to work through them with her. I will leave some time on the clock because I know we have another Member ready to ask questions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 529-19(2):  
ACCESS TO LANDS

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to Minister Simpson for allowing me some time on the clock. My question is a question I've often asked the Minister of Lands multiple times, but I want to acknowledge that I am excited for the implementation of the Public Lands Act and for the regulations to come into force. I think this is an important step. It is an important step in having control of public land in the NWT. My concern is largely with my constituents and their private land, so my question is: does the implementation of the public lands regulations contain any work to convert longstanding leases to title? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Minister of Lands.

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd like to thank the Member for coming to me and talking to me about this. I know it is a very important issue for him, and I thank him for that. I am probably going to run out the clock, but that's all right because I'm the last one talking here today.

To give this answer, it needs to be very clear and provide as much information as I can to the Member and the people of his constituency. The community boundaries, the development controls can be regulated through the Area Development Act. The Area Development Act regulates development on both private and public land in designated development areas. For the Ingraham Trail, development controls and regulations only exist for Cassidy Point and the Yellowknife watershed area. Outside of these areas there are no development control currently in place.

Before we look at fee simple plan sales along the Ingraham Trail, new regulations will need to be developed under the Area Development Act to ensure the land is managed effectively. The development of the land is currently focused on bringing the Public Land Act into force, and we will review the Area Development Act once this has been completed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. JOHNSON:** My issue with the insistence of having an Area Development Act regulations done after the Public Land Act regulations are done means I will be asking this question in four years. Additionally, I would like to point out that there are multiple areas with title outside of the Area Development Act. Prelude Lake has titled land. Therefore, there are no area development controls that the Minister says is a prerequisite for getting title. Can the Minister explain that? For example, is there any restrictions in place for those people on

Prelude with title? Could they, for example, build an apartment building or a skyscraper, for instance?

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** I hope it's not a skyscraper, but it would be really interesting to see, though. To answer the question, the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act would guide development activities. Construction of the apartment building would trigger the need for several permits and authorization under the MVRMA. Any title land or leases within the territorial park may also have restrictions for development.

**MR. JOHNSON:** I assure the Minister that the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act and our land and water boards were not designed for regulating people's properties and whether they want to put a greenhouse on their lot. The idea that they have to apply for a land use permit to the land and water board in order to change their property, it is one of these things that Lands has created and is refusing to adjust. Right now, the department knows that there are numerous people living on the trail in recreational leases, and they are not allowed to do that. They are not allowed to live in recreational leases, and yet, the department refuses to either enforce this or give them residential leases. Do the efforts to implement the Public Land Act have any solutions, or does the department plan to address this issue?

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** I hear the Member's challenges and that. It is something that I inherited, and we are working on it. The department is working hard to get these issues addressed. There're lots of land issues, and we need to focus on where our energy is right now. We are focusing in on that. Currently, the department doesn't issue residential leases outside the community boundaries. Lease types are under discussions through the Public Land Act work that is expected to be completed by 2023. I encourage all residents to visit the Government of the Northwest Territories Lands website and click on "Have your say" selection to provide input on how the Government of the Northwest Territories regulates public land. Public consultation on the Public Land Act are currently under way. The first phase of engagement will be open until February 12.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I heard that, maybe by 2023, when we bring the Public Land Act, we will be looking at leases, and maybe then it will be possible for people to legally live in their houses on the Ingraham Trail. My question is: does the department have any plans to enforce the people living in violation of their leases? Perhaps, I can get a commitment of the Minister

that, despite these people living in violation of their leases as they have done for decades, it's actually okay. Maybe I can get the Minister to tell me what is the plan for all of these people living in violation of their leases and the department does nothing about it? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** At this time, the department's priorities of enforcing, addressing unauthorized occupancy. The Member should know about that. There are over 550 unauthorized occupancies within the North Slave area, so we need to focus where our energy needs to be focused on, and that is unauthorized occupancy. I have inherited it. It is over 50 years of work, so work has to be done. Yes, I understand there're some challenges here, but we need to work on what our focus is. If the department receives complaints about using a cabin that is a cabin that is inconsistent with the purpose stated in a lease agreement, the department will follow up on a case-by-case basis. If the Member wants to bring forth concerns that people are not using these leases properly, please bring it to the department, and we will address it. We will work on that. We want to make sure people use public land properly. If the Member has these concerns and he's saying there's a whole bunch of people not using the leases properly, please bring them forward, and we will be more than willing to address them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Colleagues, our time for oral questions have expired. Member for Great Slave.

#### POINT OF ORDER

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to rise on a point of order. During oral questions, the Minister of Health and Social Services contravened Rule 24(h) and (i) by making an allegation against me and impugning false motives to me by saying I was gratified by collecting the mental health horror stories of constituents. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Great Slave. I will allow debate on both points of orders at this time. We'll start with the first one that we had, the one that Ms. Green brought forward, and then we will deal with hers. We'll do it now. Please continue.

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to suggest this debate be deferred until tomorrow so that I can consult the Hansard record to capture exactly what the Member said. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Is that on your point of order?

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Yes.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Okay. We will continue with the Member for Great Slave's point of order today. I will allow debate.

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also respectfully request that I can defer this until tomorrow so that I can also check Hansard, as well as allow myself to calm down and speak to this matter properly. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Okay. We will continue tomorrow. Please check Hansard and do your research, and we will continue tomorrow. Thank you very much. Item 11, written questions. Item 12, returns to written questions. Item 13, replies to Commissioner's address. Item 14, petitions. Item 15, tabling of documents. Minister of Infrastructure.

#### Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 299-19(2):  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES ENERGY  
INITIATIVES REPORT: REPORTING ON  
ACTIONS UNDER THE 2030 ENERGY  
STRATEGY 2019/20

**HON. DIANE ARCHIE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the following document: "Northwest Territories Energy Initiatives Report, Reporting on Actions under the 2030 Energy Strategy 2019-2020." Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Tabling of documents. Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.

TABLED DOCUMENT 300-19(2):  
NWT CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN:  
ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

TABLED DOCUMENT 301-19(2):  
RESPONDING TO CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE  
NWT: PLAIN LANGUAGE OVERVIEW REPORT  
2019/20

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the following two documents: "NWT Climate Change Action Plan, Annual Report 2019-2020;" and "Responding to Climate Change in the NWT, Plain Language Overview Report 2019-2020." Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Tabling of documents. Minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

TABLED DOCUMENT 302-19(2):  
FOLLOW-UP LETTER FOR ORAL QUESTION  
481-19(2): ELDERS HOUSING

TABLED DOCUMENT 303-19(2):  
FOLLOW-UP LETTER FOR ORAL QUESTION  
482-19(2): HIRING LOCAL

**HON. PAULIE CHINNA:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following two documents: "Follow-up Letter for Oral Question 481-19(2), Elders Housing;" and "Follow-up Letter for Oral Question 482-19(2), Hiring Local." Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Tabling of documents. Item 16, notices of motion. Member for Yellowknife North.

### Notices of Motion

MOTION 27-19(2):  
EXTENDED ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE TO  
FEBRUARY 23, 2021

**MR. JOHNSON:** Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Thursday, February 11, 2021, I will move the following motion: I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Hay River North, that, notwithstanding Rule 4, when this House adjourns on Thursday, February 11, 2021, it shall be adjourned until Friday, February 12, 2021, at 10:00 a.m.; and further that, notwithstanding Rule 4, when this House adjourns on Friday, February 12, 2021, it shall be adjourned until Tuesday, February 23, 2021, at 1:30 p.m.; and further, that any time prior to February 23, 2021, if the Speaker is satisfied, after consultation with the Executive Council and Members of the Legislative Assembly, that the public interest requires that the House should meet at an earlier time during the adjournment or at a later time than the scheduled resumption of the House, the Speaker may give notice and thereupon the House shall meet at the time stated in such notice and shall transact its business as if it had been duly adjourned to that time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. 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.

Before we continue, by the authority given to me as Speaker by Motion 1-19(2), I hereby authorize the House to sit beyond the daily hour of adjournment to consider the business before the House, with the Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes in the chair.

### Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** What is the wish of committee, Mr. Norn?

**MR. NORN:** Marsi cho, Madam Chair. Committee wishes to continue their review of 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):** We will take a short recess and resume.

---SHORT RECESS

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** [Microphone turned off] ...beginning on page 150. Sorry. I better stop. Sergeant-at-Arms, will you please escort the witnesses into the Chamber. We were going to make you fly solo. Minister, will you please introduce your witnesses for the record.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I have Sandy Kalgutkar here with me today, deputy minister of Finance and secretary to the Financial Management Board; also, Jamie Koe, deputy secretary to the Financial Management Board.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, and welcome. We will continue on where we left off: management board secretariat, beginning on page 150, with information items on page 154. We will go to the Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I wanted to ask a question about the aviation sector support. I do believe that we need to be providing support for the aviation sector to continue to provide services, particularly to smaller communities. I know this was federal funding, and I think I heard the Minister say at some point that none of this was going to go into bonuses for directors and things like that. What does this money actually cover, and are there restrictions on what it can be used for? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. There were, so far, two rounds of funding, both of which were predominantly supported by the federal government but also topped up by the GNWT. With respect to what it entailed, the first round was, I believe, in the form of a grant. However, the second didn't come with a contribution agreement, and the second round of funding did have some stipulations as part of that agreement. I do not have that agreement with me, Madam Chair, but I believe either Mr. Kalgutkar or Mr. Koe may have that information, if I might direct it to them.

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

**MR. KALGUTKAR:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The second round was, in fact, a contribution agreement, like the Minister had indicated. There were conditions that went with that funding. Number one was, as the MLA had indicated, that they could not use it to pre-pay for bonuses or any other large capital investments; it was essentially to keep minimum essential flight scheduled services going into communities. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Okay. Thanks, Madam Chair. I just want to move down the page to the NWT Heritage Fund. I know that my colleague from Thebacha was asking some questions yesterday about this. This just appears as a straight \$7,600,000 contribution into the heritage fund each year, but I know this gets reconciled somehow. However, when I turn over to page (xii) of the main estimates, it shows that the non-renewable resource revenues figures are shown there. There is also the net fiscal benefit to Aboriginal peoples on that page. Those figures just do not match up, and there is a contribution to the NWT Heritage Fund on page (xii). Why is it reported differently on that page than on this one? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. What the page, I believe, here is looking at what would be the projections or estimates of where this is going to end up year over year, and it is based on numbers that were established at the time of devolution, whereas the summary of resource revenue sharing, I believe, is a more accurate estimate. However, again for perhaps a more technical response, if I could turn it over to the deputy minister, please.

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

**MR. KALGUTKAR:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The amount that is in the management board secretariat is the base budget that we have established for that. That was, as the Minister said, established when we signed the devolution agreement. The page called "Summary of Resource Revenue Sharing," page (xii), the summary pages of the main estimates is an illustration of how that calculation is made based on the estimated resource revenues that were anticipated to be collected those fiscal years. The page probably can benefit from a note of explanation at the bottom, of what the purpose of that page is, and we could certainly do that going forward. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Member Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Yes. Thanks, Madam Chair. Yes. Then if you scroll down further into the main estimates, page 321, there is a single page that deals with the NWT Heritage Fund. I know we have not gotten to that yet, Madam Chair, but it shows different numbers for the Heritage Fund. I have got three different sets of numbers for the Heritage Fund in here. How would a member of the public know what is actually the real figure without some notes? It just does not make any sense whatsoever. I do not know why we are using devolution estimates. It has never come true. Quite frankly, I think it's just kind of misleading for anybody picking this up. They would not know exactly what is going into the heritage fund. I guess (xii) is our best guesstimate at this point. Is that the case? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, there certainly are different numbers, each one serving a different purpose or having a different function, and I was not able to get to page 321. Certainly, with respect to the page that we are on right now, it is the base-budget approach to budgeting, where this is the base budget that has been allotted and that remains here. Again, the "Summary of Resource Revenue Sharing" is actually a summary based on actual estimates or at least the estimate of the actuals. However, again, and I think this was suggested yesterday, that we can take some efforts to shift the direction and the way in which these are reported, of course, keeping in line with necessary accounting standards. I do not disagree, as much as possible, again, as long as we are continuing to align with accounting standards. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Okay. Just a little heads-up that I am going to be asking the Minister's sister Minister, Minister of ITI, about the catastrophic decline in resource revenues when we get to the ITI budget because that is really what feeds the net fiscal benefit transfer to the Aboriginal parties, which others have said is similarly going to decline from a predicted \$10 million here to as little as \$572,000. That is a 90 percent or more decline. However, I will leave that to when we get to ITI.

The Mackenzie Valley fibre link number that's shown in here, what does that really represent? Is that the annual payments that we are now giving to Northwestel as the P3 operator of the Mackenzie Valley fibre link? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am going to direct that, if you don't mind, to the deputy minister, please.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Deputy Minister Kalgutkar.

**MR. KALGUTKAR:** Thank you, Madam Chair. A big chunk of it is for the service payment that we make to Northwestel on an annual basis. Another portion of it, I believe about \$2 million of it, is for the remediation costs that we have in our budget, to make sure that the fibre line is still working in accordance with the permits that were assigned to the Department of Finance, and we do have annual remediation obligations to make sure that that line is up to those standards. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Thanks for the information. The revenues from this, I don't know where I got this around \$1.2 million. We are obviously paying a lot more than what we are getting back out of this. I was in the last Assembly. My impression was that this was going to sort of at some point transition into maybe closer to a break-even kind of situation. We are certainly nowhere near that now. Are we getting the kind of revenues that we expected or that were predicted out of the Mackenzie Valley fibre link? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I do not have the revenue page in front of me, so if I could direct it to the deputy

minister and see if we have that information here. If not, we would commit to getting that to the Member.

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

**MR. KALGUTKAR:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The estimated revenue, the Member is correct, is about \$1.2 million. That is based on the current customers that we have on the line right now. I believe we have eight customers on the line. When we did the business case for the fibre, we did anticipate that, for the first part of the project, the government would be providing most of the shortfall and that, as more and more satellite facilities became operational into that area, then the project would start paying for itself. However, it was anticipated that that would happen far into the project. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, deputy minister. Member for Deh Cho.

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** Mahsi, Madam Chair. I am looking at the carbon tax offset. Can the Minister explain to me the purpose of that program? Mahsi.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The carbon tax offset is in place to offset the carbon tax that is imposed on a variety of different fuel taxes. The offset is there to ensure that particularly residents and businesses in the Northwest Territories have some ability to offset the impact of the carbon tax. This is done by way of rebates and offsets that continue to increase as the carbon tax itself continues to increase over time. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** I am wondering about that program. You are offsetting stuff. I know it's to help people who are actually paying for their own fuel, but I also note at the same time that there are many residents who live in public housing units with the NWT Housing Corporation who don't actually pay into that. Because we are giving back a lot of money to the residents, I don't know how much of this is actually kept by the GNWT. I am just thinking more in line with using the offsets that we get or the tax that we get and line it up more for green energy projects. Mahsi.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The cost-of-living offset does go to all residents, and there is certainly a portion that is

also available for large emitters in terms of their ability to undertake projects with respect to more green-type energy. Specific to the example of someone who may be living in public housing, they would still have access to the cost-of-living offset. They may not necessarily receive some of the more specific ones. To answer the question, everyone does get the cost-of-living offset, regardless of whether they are paying into it or not. Essentially, it is being subsidized by some of the larger increases or larger revenue sources that we have on this. I should also note, really, it is derived from the Canada-wide system, so we can't be too flexible about what we're doing here. To a certain degree, we have to go back and make sure that we are in line with the expectations that we have to comply with our agreement with Canada. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Are there any further questions under the management board secretariat? Seeing no questions, I will call the page. Finance, management board secretariat, operations expenditure summary, 2021-2022 Main Estimates, \$97,683,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. We will now move to page 155, Office of the Comptroller General, with information on pages 158 to 162. The information items on the Northwest Territories Heritage Fund and Cannabis Revolving Fund, sorry. Question? Member for Yellowknife North.

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at page 156. My question is about the \$9-million interest on the Deh Cho Bridge. Can I just get a refresher of how long we will be paying that for? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. My recollection is -- let's not go with my recollection. Let me ask the deputy minister if he has a more certain recollection, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. KALGUTKAR:** Thank you, Madam Chair. When we assumed the Deh Cho Bridge debt, the debt was for, I believe, a 40-year bond, and I believe it ends in 2046. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Perhaps this is just me not understanding how things are listed here. I also see we have short-term interest here. Can I just get clarification that these two interest payments then show up on the overall debt figures for the GNWT in the borrowing plan? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, that's correct.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The Deh Cho Bridge is long past any of us in this House's time, but it's a reminder that we love these large infrastructure projects and perhaps, at the time, they seem very enticing. I don't look forward to the Member who has to sit here in 2046 and ask why we're still paying \$9 million a year in interest. Actually, perhaps by that time, we will have paid some of it down. I'm not sure how the financing works. Moving on there, can I get clarification? We spent \$7 million here on a territorial subsidy program. My understanding is that then subsidizes the rate of power across the Northwest Territories essentially to be pinned at the rate in Yellowknife. Can I just get a little bit more clarification if that's correct and how that works? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It is slightly more complicated than that, Madam Chair. If I could direct it over to the deputy minister, please.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Deputy minister.

**MR. KALGUTKAR:** Thank you, Madam Chair. What the power subsidy program does is provide residents in the thermal rate zone to equalize the rates to the rates that the Yellowknife residents pay. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I have some issues with this showing up in the Finance budget. I recognize perhaps there is an argument to be made that we should subsidize power in the smaller communities, the thermal communities, a.k.a. diesel communities. Providing power to those communities is extremely costly, but I just question why this shows up in Finance. The Power Corporation already has a variance of rates used



for different regions. There is already a formula set out where, I believe, Fort Smith pays less power than Hay River, and Hay River pays a little more than Yellowknife. There are different rates based on the infrastructure and the costing that the Power Corporation has done. As an arm's-length government corporation, can I just get some reasoning as to why we then go and give them more money for this specific program? It seems out of touch with how they do the rest of their programming. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Not being responsible for the Power Corporation, I am not well-placed to answer this, but let me see if I could direct it to the deputy minister. He may be able to fill in some details.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Deputy minister.

**MR. KALGUTKAR:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Because the Comptroller General's Office is the one who makes the payments to the Power Corporation, that's why the subsidy shows up in the Finance budget. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I will leave that one as it is. It's there because it's there. I have asked this previously: the Internal Audit Bureau does a number of functions. I am actually very unclear exactly what they do or what their reports look like, because they are confidential and I've never seen one. One of my concerns is that we are going through a process to renew our financials, and in much of that work, the Comptroller General and the Internal Audit Bureau, I believe, already does; or at least the description of what they are supposed to do includes things such as risk assessment or evaluation of value for money of programming. Is the Minister willing to share the reports of the Internal Audit Bureau with committee? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The Internal Audit Bureau doesn't do program evaluation or the value for dollar, necessarily, in the same way as an accredited evaluator would. They are responsible for and certainly they do do evaluations and examinations that look at risk and do risk assessments across different departments, so I need to take away and see what information we can provide. I certainly would like to ensure that the work that they are doing is more accessible. I have had some

conversations with the department, but we haven't quite landed on where and how to best make that information available. I will commit to getting something, and I have every confidence that, if the Members of the committee are unsatisfied, then we will discuss that in further detail. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Moving on to the medical travel assistance line, \$8,788,000, I believe this is the medical travel that applies to GNWT workers only. My understanding is also that, when you compare this number to the amount of GNWT workers and their dependants that it serves compared to the medical travel larger for the territory, it's clear that we are paying a much higher rate for GNWT workers' medical travel. Can I just have the Minister speak to some of the reasons for that and some of the extras that you get in medical travel when you are a GNWT employee? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, the Member is correct. This is a line item that is reflective of basically an employee benefit, not dissimilar to the fact that other workplaces would have medical or dental or other types of benefits. This is a specifically medical benefit that is part of the collective bargaining agreement that is negotiated on behalf of GNWT employees. As to the specifics, it actually may well have been in response to a question from one of the MLAs recently that I have had that outlined, but if I could, perhaps, I will see if the deputy minister has that handy, please.

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

**MR. KALGUTKAR:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't have it handy, but as the Minister had indicated, our benefits are driven by what is negotiated in the collective agreement. The most significant change is the difference between what the employees get versus what NWT residents get. It's really some of the travel benefits that they are entitled to. We try to mirror the medical travel benefits with what employees get for GNWT duty travel, which are driven by per diems and certain types of airfare. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I recognize that this is driven by collective bargaining, and that is what it is. We always try to

find some sort of agreement at the bargaining table, but I think there is a bit of an equity here where, if you're a GNWT worker, your medical travel is much better than if you are a general member of the public. I just heard you get your per diems covered based on a GNWT rate. I can see the justification for providing our employees per diems when travelling for work, but I'm not sure that same justification applies for medical travel when they could just as well use the medical travel that is good enough for every other NWT resident at a much lesser cost. I don't have control over collective bargaining, but my question for the Minister is: is this something that she is willing to bring to the collective bargaining table to look at as a potential cost-saving area? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Madam Chair, many members of the general public actually have access to their own medical plans through their own employers and their own employee benefit plans. I just want to caution that it's maybe not quite fair or accurate to compare this to every member of the general public. I also have no doubt that there are many members of the general public who do not have access to any kind of medical plans or certainly not one that is equivalent to this, but they may have other benefits that accrue to them. We certainly have a generous medical benefit for employees, and it is part of collective bargaining.

As to the details and contents of collective bargaining, I am not in a position to sit here right now and make a commitment, because that is something that goes through a deputy minister's committee process, goes through Cabinet, and is one that is taken fairly seriously and considered quite carefully in light of the importance of having our staff and our collective bargaining go in a way that is respectful. I suppose I, frankly, should note that there is an outstanding notice to bargain right now, so I would not be in a position to make any commitments one way or the other. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Comments or questions from Members regarding the Office of the Comptroller? No further questions. Please turn to page 156. Finance, Office of the Comptroller General, operations expenditures summary, 2020-2021 Main Estimates, \$76,631,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Members, please turn now to the departmental summary found on page 137. Finance, operations

expenditures, total department, 2021-2022 Main Estimates, \$301,826,000. Mr. Norn.

COMMITTEE MOTION 75-19(2):  
TABLED DOCUMENT 286-19(2): MAIN  
ESTIMATES 2021-2022 - FINANCE - DEFERRAL  
OF DEPARTMENT (PAGE 137),  
CARRIED

**MR. NORN:** Madam Chair, I move that this committee defer further consideration of the estimates for the Department of Finance at this time. Marsi cho, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** The motion is in order. To the motion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

---Carried

Further consideration of Department of Finance, operations expenditures, total department is deferred. Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing before us. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses from the Chamber. We will take about five minutes for the Minister of the next department.

---SHORT RECESS

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you Committee. We will resume consideration of Tabled Document 286-19(2), Main Estimates 2021-2022. Does the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment have any opening remarks?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Yes, I do, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, committee, I am here to present the 2021-2022 Main Estimates for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Overall, the department's estimates propose an increase of \$13.3 million, or 3.9 percent, over the 2020-2021 Main Estimates. These estimates support the mandate objectives for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment while continuing to meet the GNWT's fiscal objectives to prioritize responsible and strategic spending.

Highlights of the proposed estimates include forced-growth funding of \$4.3 million, including:

- an additional \$4.1 million to address the increased demand on the Income Assistance program; and
- \$222,000 to establish two student records coordinator positions, each with a two-year term, to handle record requests related to the

Federal Indian Day School Class Action Settlement.

The proposed estimates also reflect a total increase of \$2.591 million to support new initiatives. This amount is comprised of:

- \$1.17 million to expand senior secondary Northern Distance Learning program in 20 small communities;
- \$508,000 to establish three regional based career and education advisor positions to enhance post-secondary awareness and employment opportunities for grades 9 to 12 students;
- \$306,000 to support the modernization of the Education Act;
- \$265,000 to support the development and implementation of competency-based professional standards for JK to 12 educators, to improve educators' certification process, and to increase opportunities for educators to access online professional collaboration;
- \$177,000 to support the quality assurance requirements needed under the Post-Secondary Education Act; and
- \$165,000 to continue phase 3 and undertake phase 4 of the NWT school and community child and youth care counsellors program.

The proposed estimates also reflect a total increase of \$8.893 million for other adjustments, which include:

- \$4.255 million to continue supporting JK to 12 schools in remaining open during the pandemic;
- \$1.088 million to implement two new benefits to support post-secondary students in their technology needs during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- \$774,000 to increase the valuation allowance provision of the Student Loan Revolving Fund;
- \$711,000 to provide additional funding for minority and second language education programs in accordance with the newly signed Canada-NWT Cooperation Agreement;
- \$600,000 to support labour market recovery efforts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the NWT;
- \$600,000 to fund the development of an Indigenous Languages Adult Immersion Diploma in partnership with Aurora College, the

University of Victoria, and Indigenous governments;

- \$500,000 to continue an infrastructure fund to assist early learning and childcare programs with a cost of property improvements or new construction needed to offer new or expanded licensed programming; and
- \$365,000 to maintain 12 multi-person family housing units for Aurora College in Inuvik.

These increases are partially offset by a total decrease of \$2.299 million reflecting funding scheduled to sunset on March 31, 2021. The sunsets reflect year-over-year changes and departmental activities in Northern Distance Learning and Northern Studies expansion; time limited funding of Aurora College Housing in Inuvik; time limited funding of a student records coordinator position; as well as redirection of Child and Youth Care Counsellors implementation funding from ECE to Health and Social Services.

These estimates continue to support the priorities of the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly by:

- implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples through continued support for Indigenous language revitalization initiatives;
- advancing universal childcare by increasing availability and affordability by continuing to implement the actions identified in the Right From the Start: A Framework and Action Plan for Early Childhood Development in the NWT 2013-2023 and the Early Learning and Childcare Canada-NWT Bilateral Agreement and Action Plan;
- increasing student education outcomes to the same level as the rest of Canada through increased opportunities in all NWT small schools through Northern Distance Learning, and the implementation of an action plan that responds to the Education Renewal and Innovation Framework Evaluation 2020 and the Office of the Auditor General of Canada Report on Early Childhood to Grade 12 Education in the NWT 2020;
- enabling seniors to age in place with dignity by increasing the Senior Home Heating Subsidy and creating a separate Income Assistance program tailored to seniors and persons with disabilities; and
- transforming Aurora College into an accredited and independent polytechnic university by continuing to develop the polytechnic university implementation plan.

That concludes my opening remarks. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Yes, I do.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. With us today, we have Ms. Rita Mueller, deputy minister of Education, Culture and Employment, and Mr. Sam Shannon, assistant deputy minister, corporate management. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Welcome. Committee, I would just like to remind everyone today for the Minister, his witnesses, and the Members to address their questions through the chair. Thank you. We have agreed to forego general comments. Does committee agree to proceed to the detail contained in the tabled document?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Committee, we will defer the departmental summary and review the estimates by activity summary, beginning with corporate management, starting on page 33 with information items on page 34. Questions from Members? Member for Yellowknife North.

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think, probably, of all the legislative work that is released in the business plans on the legislative agenda, the Education Act is the most significant that this House has decided to take on. I also note that I think, for whatever reason, when you look across GNWT departments, there's just the policy legislation, and sometimes it includes communication and sometimes it doesn't. Shops just vary widely in size for no real reason. I think ENR's shop is about 12 people, which is the same size, if not larger, than ECE's, despite a completely different workload. All that to say, I think that there is probably a larger issue of making sure that each department has a fair, relative to the other departments, policy shop compared to workload.

I am concerned that this department, specifically, does not have the capacity to take on the Education Act. I think the Minister has spoken to this previously. In some jurisdictions, there would be hundreds of people working on curriculum. There would be dozens and dozens of people trying to take on this work, and we are obviously a jurisdiction that can't afford to do that. I was hoping that the Minister could speak to whether he thinks

the capacity in this policy and legislation shop is sufficient to bring forward the Education Act on time and to the full extent that I think it needs to be changed. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Committee will note that there are a couple of extra positions here to assist with that type of work. I believe that we will be able to bring the act in on time and, more importantly, to do the work to the extent that it needs to be done. Honestly, I am more concerned about doing it right than doing it quickly, and if that means adjusting timelines at the end of the Assembly and perhaps we even just leave this for the next Assembly after all of the work has been done, I am open to looking into things, as well. I was part of an Assembly where I saw how rushed legislation caused issues and don't want that to happen, so we're putting in place the right people, the right positions, and putting in the work. We have a solid timeline, and I hope or I believe that we can do what we need to do, but we won't be sacrificing quality. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes. I am fully supportive of seeing these two positions and hearing that they are there for the Education Act. I am terrified at the prospect of not getting the Education Act done in the life of this Assembly. I actually don't think we took on that ambitious of a legislative agenda, because of the lessons learned in the last Assembly of trying to get too much done and then not doing it properly. To me, the Education Act is one of the pinnacle pieces of legislation that this Assembly has decided to tackle. Can I just get an update from the Minister of when he expects the Education Act to be introduced and when committee can expect to see an LP? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. An LP, I think that we're looking at, let me see, 2022. Is that correct? Some point in 2022. I'll have to flip through my briefing binder for the exact date, but introduction of the bill, we hope for February/March of 2023, which would give ample time for committee to do the work they need to do on that bill. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you. Yes, February/March of 2023 is about the latest you could introduce a bill and make sure committee has time. I recognize that it is possible to get it done and give committee time to review that, but I would caution the Minister that, if there was any chance of this getting delayed, that date should remain firm. No further questions, Your Honour. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Are there any other questions under corporate management? Member for Monfwi.

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Madam Chair, probably just more of a clarification. I'm on page 33, fees and payments. It went up slightly. What consists of fees and payment? Madam Chair, masi.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I would like to ask Mr. Shannon to take that.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Mr. Shannon.

**MR. SHANNON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. That would include payments under our planning, research, and evaluation for any third-party evaluations and things of that nature that we need to conduct. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Mr. Shannon. Member for Monfwi.

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Masi, Madam Chair. Just going down further, to travel. I thought for sure that travel would be reduced, but it has gone up again. What is the rationale for travel going up from last year to this year? Masi.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, and I can hand it over to perhaps Mr. Shannon to take it, but I will note that this is just part of the department's overall travel budget. Of course, it is spread across the various divisions, and there was a significant reduction, I believe, between 2018-2019 and 2019-2020, and so we have trimmed the fat from the budget. I can ask Mr. Shannon for some more information on this particular item. Thank you.

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

**MR. SHANNON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. The travel budget for this was developed with a great deal of uncertainty on how things would look going into the next fiscal year, but it was anticipated travel to support the Education Act modernization; planning, research, and

evaluation; and also deputy minister and senior management travel for things such as FPT meetings, and things of that nature. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Mr. Shannon. Are there any further questions under the corporate management? Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I see, I guess this is page 78, that there is a line that says finance and capital planning. Is this the area of the budget where money could or should be found for the work that needs to be done to renovate or maybe even build a new museum here in Yellowknife? Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Just to clarify, we are on page 33 and you are on page 78?

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I'm looking at the electronic version that was provided to us when we reviewed the main estimates. Sorry. Yes, it is page 33 of the hard copy. There is a line there that says finance and capital planning, and I am just wondering if that's the line item where money could and should be found for helping to fix up the museum, and maybe even expanding it or building a new facility for the archives, that kind of work. Is that where the money would be found? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Perhaps I could hand this to the deputy minister for an update on that work because, regardless of where it's found, I can provide the committee with some information. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Specific to the work that needs to be done at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, that would fall under the culture, heritage and languages section. We have had a recent study done to look at that whole infrastructure and what the potential costs would be to do all of the work, and it is quite high, so now, we're in the midst of doing a study to look at how we could bring in other revenue to try to offset the costs of that work that would need to be done. Right now, here on page 33 under finance and capital planning, I would have to turn to Mr. Shannon, but I don't think this is the section at all that we would use for that work.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, deputy minister. Mr. Shannon.

**MR. SHANNON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Any funding for the redevelopment or any new building or construction or anything to do with the Prince of Wales would be in our capital estimates. However, finance and capital planning is our division in headquarters that includes our capital planning section in positions that work with, as Ms. Mueller mentioned, staff in the culture and heritage division to develop the plans to do that construction, ultimately. This is more of the planning function as opposed to the capital budget for the construction project. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I am not asking, at this point, where is the money for the capital. Where is the money for planning this? This facility has lived way past its planned life. There was a flood in the basement when water lines were replaced recently. I have been over. I have looked at it. There are jury-rigged humidity systems and dehumidifiers and stuff all over the place. This building is way beyond its normal life. Is there any money in the budget, in this section, for planning for replacing the building? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. There was money for planning. A plan was done. I believe it was shared with committee. I have discussed it in this House. It is quite a visionary retrofit and expansion of the facility. Given where we are with our finances, I'm not sure if that is something that is doable. That being said, the Member points out that there are significant deficiencies with the current structure that need to be addressed. We have money, and we are doing planning on how we can address those deficiencies and, as part of that, what we can do to perhaps raise revenues to offset it, as well. Yes, to the Member's point, there is money. It is being spent, and it is being spent with the intention of ensuring that the Prince of Wales heritage centre, the life of it can be extended and that we can fulfill our obligation, our statutory obligation to maintain the archives of the Government of the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks for that, or thanks, Madam Chair, and thanks to the Minister for that. Is there a timeline for when this study on potential revenues is going to be completed? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I believe that we are getting close. I think it's in March, but I can go to the deputy minister for more information. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Deputy Minister Mueller.

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister. Our goal is working towards having it completed by March 31<sup>st</sup> of this fiscal. Thank you.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Can I get a commitment out of the Minister to share that report with the Regular MLAs? I am really quite interested in seeing that and trying to move this along before something catastrophic happens to the building. Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Yes. Whatever we can share with the Members, we would be happy to. I don't want anything catastrophic to happen, either. Thank you.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks. That is all for now, but the Minister knows I love the museum and that I am going to keep pressing them on it, so I look forward to that study maybe in early April. Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Are there any further questions under Education, Culture and Employment, corporate management? Member for Kam Lake.

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just on that same tune, I just wanted to follow up in regard to the line of questioning from my colleague from Frame Lake. I do not think it's a secret in this House that I have a definite appreciation for the arts and would like to see them preserved, as well. The Northwest Territories is very rich in culture, and it has an incredible art collection. Right now, a lot of our art collection ends up being stored away and does not end up being visible to a lot of the people of the Northwest Territories. I am wondering if there is a plan to be able to publicly display, share, and safely store pieces, kind of in almost a revolving fashion, throughout the Northwest Territories so as that stuff is not only sitting here at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre and is also being enjoyed

by people all over the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I have approached the department. We have had discussions about the fact that I see our heritage centres around the territory and communities around the territory as valuable assets and ones that perhaps we can support more and allow for those types of exhibits to travel around. A lot of the artifacts we have need certain conditions. They need to be handled in certain ways, and we need to make sure that, if we do that, if we are going to transfer them around the territory, that they can be held in those certain ways. We are undertaking a survey of the infrastructure needs of all of the heritage centres in the territory to determine what we can do to ensure that they are able to do the type of thing that the Member is talking about. That being said, there is not a plan right now for a travelling art show, but we are in the early stages of getting the right infrastructure in place, hopefully. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just in the same vein, a lot of the huge facilities that we see down south are not only supported by either the people or by government. They are also largely supported by private investors. I am wondering if the Northwest Territories, given that there is definitely a need and a want for reconciliation and a need and a want to preserve and celebrate cultures of Canada, if there are current talks with different investors across Canada and maybe even across the world with opportunities to invest in northern art and the preservation and enjoyment of it. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I think we are really getting into a different section right now, the culture and heritage section, when we talk about, really, programming and things like that, so perhaps we can address it at that point.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Member for Kam Lake.

**MS. CLEVELAND:** I am happy to be patient. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** All right. Are there any further questions under corporate management? Seeing no further questions, please turn to page 33. Education, Culture and

Employment, corporate management, operations expenditure summary, 2021-2022 Main Estimates, \$10,933,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, committee. We will now turn to culture, heritage, and languages, beginning on page 35, with information items on page 39. Questions? Member Kam Lake.

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I got a little excited when I heard my colleague talking about art, and I thought we were in the next section. I am wondering if the Minister is game to talk about potential for large investors in an arts and heritage - - maybe not only one but maybe multiple throughout the Northwest Territories and how we can potentially create kind of a network of art celebration across the territory. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I will also point out that the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre does have travelling exhibits that go to schools, as well. What the Member is talking about, I am not sure if this is typically something that governments do. It sounds like this is something that private foundations do down South. Part of what we are doing with the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre planning study is looking at other models, as well, that are used around Canada and how we can perhaps utilize different models to bring in some foreign investment. Perhaps I can ask the deputy minister for more pointed information directed to the Member's question, though. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. As far as collections and the purchase of collections on behalf of the Government of the Northwest Territories, that is something that our staff do and are very open to looking and making sure that our collection does represent all of the people and regions and cultures and heritages across the Northwest Territories. One of the things that we are doing is we are working with Indigenous governments because Indigenous governments are really interested in not only knowing specifically what artifacts and art pieces are in our collections right now. That is something that is ongoing, making sure that they are aware of those pieces, but also, where possible -- and in some cases it's temperature control or, as the Minister mentioned, it's the way that items are transported -- really working with them to identify

how we can get those pieces back into the communities or into the region. They are especially interested under celebrations to have certain pieces. That is something that we are doing. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. No, that is really exciting to hear, and I think that there is great potential, too, with collaborations for spaces, as well, not only to store, archive, and celebrate pieces of art but also to create it. Before we were elected, ITI along with ECE did art strategy meetings where they met in different communities to talk to different artists about what they wanted to see in order to grow and sell great art in the Northwest Territories, and they were really exciting sessions. However, some time has passed since then, and so I am wondering when that art strategy will be released. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The art strategy, in the coming weeks. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. That is really exciting, and I cannot wait to see it. I think there was a lot of passion and a lot of people who put a lot of time into it, and so I think it will be really nice to see. One of the biggest things that came out of that over and over and over again that I noticed at sessions from different artists was the need for space not only to be able to show artwork but also to be able to create it. I am wondering if the art strategy, if the Minister can let us know if it speaks to space to not only view art but also create it. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I do not really want to ruin the surprise, but the strategy recognizes all of the issues that were brought up. It has a range of different ideas of things that we could do, that we would like to do, so it touches on many different things. There is not the commitment in there to build a dedicated artists' studio or anything like that, though. I can tell the Member that. It will be coming. The public will get a chance to see it, and there's a lot of good stuff in there. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Minister. I can definitely say that this is something near and dear to my heart and something that I am very much looking forward to seeing. It is hard not being able to constructively criticize, I guess we'll say, as we're sitting here talking about the budget. Can the Minister speak to whether or not there is money within this budget to implement any of the things from the arts strategy that we'll see in the coming weeks? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. There's not specific budget lines in here, but to the Member's point, I've had conversations with the department that, in the future, every single strategy, every single action plan to be released, will have dollar amounts tied to it. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate what the Minister says, but at the same time, with the utmost respect, we're about to release a strategy then that doesn't have dollars attached to it. This is definitely one that I don't want to see sitting on a shelf and not having anything done with it. Will the strategy also have a plan of how it's going to be implemented? Will there be a phased approach to it? How are we going to make this? How are we going to turn text into action without a budget to go with it? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. There are people in the department who work on projects, cultural projects and arts projects. They will continue to do that work. They will be guided by the strategies now. There are employees. There are resources that can be put towards this, but there is not, as I said, a dedicated dollar amount for a new artists' studio or something like that if that is what the Member is looking for. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I can assure the Minister that when it comes to dreaming about arts, it is more than a studio that I have in mind. One of the lines I'd like to move on to is the Indigenous scholarships, which indicates for this year no budget line item, and I just am hoping that the Minister can speak to that for the public? Thank you.

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



**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I will pass this off to the deputy minister for some explanation. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Deputy Minister Mueller.

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. Yes. We do have scholarships. To answer, we do have the same amount of Indigenous language \$5,000 scholarships available. We're just cleaning up. It is shown in a different section where you're going to see we've created a line item for those Indigenous scholarships. It seems like we don't, but we do have the money for it in a separate line item.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am wondering if the Minister can briefly explain what the public will be getting from the \$200,000 line item for Indigenous languages revitalization, and what they can expect to come out of that? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Minister.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Sorry. I am just looking for the line item. Things are moving quite quickly here. What page are we on?

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thirty-seven.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. That is part of the \$600,000 that we received after the last main estimates, and so it is broken out throughout some different areas. That is all money that is going towards the development of an Indigenous languages diploma program in collaboration with University of Victoria and Aurora College. As for the specific dollars in this section, I can pass it over to Mr. Shannon.

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

**MR. SHANNON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The \$200,000 that appears under contributions for Indigenous languages revitalization is targeted for the partnership with Aurora College, the University of Victoria. Also, with Indigenous governments as the diploma is developed.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The Member has a lot of interests in the arts, and I was wondering, would the Member commit to taking a tour of the Prince of Wales heritage centre where she can see a lot of the great work, a lot of the behind-the-

scenes work, and she can ask a lot of these questions directly to the staff who I am sure would be happy to answer. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. I will move on to Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I just have a couple of things I want to raise here. The Minister talked about that there was some kind of survey of all the heritage centres, their needs that are under way. I have had a chance to travel to the Yukon several times, and I want to encourage the Minister and the staff to look at some of the fabulous First Nation Centres that have been established in the Yukon. I've been personally to the Champagne and Aishihik First Nation Centre in Haines Junction. We could see that the outside of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation facility, the Teslin Tlingit Heritage Centre as well. These are absolutely stunning facilities that include areas on the outside of the physical building for cultural activities. There's people working in there on language revitalization. They have cultural objects, historic artifacts. There's storytelling areas. It just boggles my mind.

I really want to encourage you and your staff to look at some of the photos, and I can share some of them with you, if you'd like. A lot of that funding came from the federal government. I don't know why we're not partnering with First Nation Indigenous governments here to do the same kind of thing. It really takes some vision and leadership to do that kind of work. I have lots of confidence in the Minister across on the other side to do this, but that's the kind of thing that I think we should be aiming for here. Go over and find out what they're doing in the Yukon and learn from that experience and bring some of that here. Is that something the Minister is prepared to look into? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I won't be going to the Yukon anytime soon but note to the Member's point. I've had those discussions, and I believe there is increasing interest from Indigenous governments, as well, to start displaying their own pieces and doing those types of things. I can ask the deputy minister who might have some more information on this, but we're very open to all those kinds of things. I have a feeling the people at the Prince of Wales heritage centre are very well aware of what's going on in the Yukon and around Canada, so I'd like to hand it to my deputy minister. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. Yes. Just to build on what the Minister said, Indigenous governments have expressed a real interest in working with the culture and heritage staff at the Prince of Wales in that division to really explore where there is opportunities within their own communities and within their own region to either have like mini cultural centres or a combination of art studios, as well, as well as looking at opportunities for on-the-land opportunities where those kinds of activities can take place out on the land that are more family oriented. Certainly, there's an interest there, and our staff do their best to try to respond and help as those discussions take place, or that thinking and that planning takes place. Thank you.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I know the Minister maybe feels he can't go to the Yukon right now, but I'm happy to share lots of great photos with him, even if I took them myself. I wanted to go into one other area. I know that, of course, we have the Northern Studies Program component of our education system. As I understood that one of the really important tools that students had access to and could look at is the NWT timeline that's on the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage website. I just thought I'd kind of call that up to see where it's at, and I get this thing on my screen that says, "Adobe Flash Player is blocked." You can't even get into the timeline now.

This, as I understood, is a really important for tool for students in that the Northern Studies course that they have to take in high school. At one time, this was a state-of-the-art website with lots of information. You would have boxes that would open and give people history, links; there were videos, sound recordings. It was a tremendous asset. Now, it's blocked. It doesn't work anymore. Is there a plan to get this online again? Especially with COVID, we know that our high school students are spending less time in the classroom. Is this going to get fixed? Is there some money in the budget to fix this? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. As I am sure Members are aware, Adobe officially stopped supporting and providing updates to Adobe Flash on December 31, 2020. The internet was outraged, but it has been a long time coming. The timeline was using that. There is not money in the budget to deal with that specific issue. However, a lot of operations go on without specific line items attached to them, so the department will look into this. It's interesting that the Member brings this up. I

was looking at the timeline a few hours ago, actually, and I was going to bring this to the department. He's not the only one concerned. Thank you.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. There's a great line, "Great minds think alike, though fools seldom differ," but I am glad to hear that the Minister and I are on the same page on this one. I just can't say enough about this timeline. At one point, it was state-of-the-art. I know the person who was kind of involved in helping set this up. Unfortunately, that capacity was kind of swept up in the ISS storm where everybody was centralized over at Finance. I am not convinced that the department still has the capability to do this on its own anymore. If there are no resources dedicated to get this done in the budget here, I am a little bit disappointed, especially because we have students who are trying to do work from home and can't even get this kind of resource on the Internet. Can the Minister give me a timeline for when this work is going to be done? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** I can't give the Member a timeline at this point, but just because there is no line item, it doesn't mean that there aren't people who do the work. The Member is correct that ISSS acquired 74 or 76 positions a few years ago, and one of those was the person who was working at the Prince of Wales heritage centre. That being said, there is that relationship whereby we are supported by ISSS, and there are people there to do the work. It's not like, without the line item, it doesn't get done. There are people who do it, and we will ensure that it gets done. Thank you.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I appreciate the Minister's response, and I will probably periodically ask for updates on the floor of the House. Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member. Moving on, then, to Member for Thebacha.

**MS. MARTSELOS:** As an Indigenous person born and raised here and a former chief, it would be not okay if I didn't make comments on culture, heritage, and languages. My first question is about the NWT Arts Council. There is \$700,000 that is put in there. I would like to know how this money is disbursed. Is it disbursed by the NWT Arts Council that is a board here in Yellowknife and then goes out and decides

who is going to get what? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The NWT Arts Council is made up of representatives from different regions across the territory. There is regional representation; it's not a board here in Yellowknife. They do make determinations about which projects that apply do get funding. Thank you.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Madam Chair, could I get the Minister to give me the list of the grants that are given to the recipients that are worth \$700,000, please? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I'm seeing if I have a list right here. I don't have the exact list, but it is something that ECE does publish annually. Perhaps I can ask the deputy minister to expand. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. For this money that is available, it is by application. There are two calls a year for artists to apply. It is the Arts Council, as the Minister described, that go through using the criteria to determine the amounts allocated. Once that has been recommended, the Arts Council makes those recommendations to the Minister, and once approved, the artists are contacted and notified of their application and the amounts that they will be receiving. Yes, we can provide previous lists of the most recent calls. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Deputy Minister Mueller. We will get a commitment that we get the list. Member for Thebacha.

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to also look at the support to northern performers. I would like to ask the Minister to provide a list of recipients who are northern performers. I'm asking this because, when I was in Salt River, we had asked the Government of the Northwest Territories for funding for our Treaty Land Entitlement days and got nothing. I would like to know where those grants for performing arts and festivals and organizations go to. I would like to sort of have an idea, so I would like a list for that, too, please. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Sure. We could provide a list.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** I like the idea of one of my colleagues, one we call "sharing the art." It doesn't necessarily have to go to another museum, Madam Chair, to display art that is stored away here. I think that the Salt River First Nations building is a wonderful place to be sharing the art. It has a lot of potential. I would like to make sure that it would be added to the list if we are going to start sharing the art. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I can ask the deputy minister for some information on how art currently travels around and what programs there are in place. The program I was talking about earlier was specifically about heritage centres to see what infrastructure they might need, but the deputy minister might be able to add more detail. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister. For the most part, when we have artifacts, items, art travelling, it's usually through partnership with Indigenous governments. It's often around a theme or a particular celebration, and there is work that is done between the Indigenous governments and our experts at the Prince of Wales to determine the type of structure that is needed for transportation as well as the temperature control and heating for certain items. I just wanted to share that.

We also have, as the Minister alluded to earlier, beautiful travelling kits and exhibits that are meant to travel. They are used a lot by our junior kindergarten to grade 12 schools. There are a number of themes related. They are meant as objects that are touched and used by children and youth from JK all the way to grade 12, but communities can also sign them out. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Madam Chair, I would also like to know about the arts organizations operating fund. It says, "contributions to provide ongoing operational support to established arts

organizations and large cultural events in the Northwest Territories." I would like a list of exactly where the \$460,000 goes to so that I have an idea of where the distribution is. I just want to make sure, Madam Chair, that small communities and regional centres also benefit from this culture, heritage and languages because that is where most of the Aboriginal people live, the majority in all communities, except for probably Hay River, maybe, but everywhere else it's all majority Aboriginal population. I am very concerned about this, Madam Chair, and I would like a clear answer. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. We can provide that, as well.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** In the Indigenous language adult immersion in your opening statements with regard to \$600,000 to develop the Indigenous language adult immersion diploma, it's very vague as to how that is going to be. I just want to know exactly more detail on that, if that is possible, because we are talking about Indigenous languages here. I would like the Minister to answer that question, please.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I can ask the deputy minister to expand on where all the money is found throughout here, and then we can get into the details of the program if the Member likes. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. What is being proposed for 2021-2022 is on our ongoing work in working with Aurora College, University of Victoria, and Indigenous governments. Those are the partners, along with ECE, in developing a one-year certificate, leading to a two-year diploma, leading then to different career paths for Indigenous language speakers, proficient speakers, in a variety of different ways: broadcasting, interpreter-translator programs, community instructors, JK to grade 12 Indigenous language instructors, and so on. Part of this funding is for the staff. Part of this funding is for the actual money distributed to Indigenous governments so that they can be part of an advisory council to oversee all of this work, and a large sum of the money is also for the brokering with University of Victoria, which we have not yet landed on the exact

amount, but as the school that is supporting and helping us develop our own northern adult Indigenous language certificate diploma and perhaps other programs in the future. Thank you.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** I have no further questions.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

**MR. NORN:** Marsi cho, Madam Chair. Just looking, I wanted to speak to the Indigenous languages portion of this, of these line items. I cannot thank enough for the work that our interpreters and translators do here. It's really, really important work. It's not just here in the Legislative Assembly. There will be times that our residents are going to need services in the courts. It could be during public meetings and other areas that their services are needed. My first question is about this revitalization, and I just want to see where the Indigenous languages line item and the revitalization ends and how those parameters work because I am thinking along the lines of, yes, it's important once you start translating in public meetings, it's important to always keep that ongoing training because the languages are always changing. There is new terminology, like in science, law, legislation, and I have been approached by our language speakers, saying, "We need more workshops just to keep things updated, keep it always fresh, and meet with other translators to keep the language alive." It's so important. My question to the Minister is: what type of workshops? Is that included in here? Are there any plans to get that program going? Marsi cho.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. There is a plan to bring all of the translators together in March. I think there are around 30 or so interpreter-translators in the territory whom the Legislative Assembly and Indigenous governments regularly use. We want to bring them together so we can start that work and find out, "Okay. What is it that you need? Is it technical training on new vocabulary that does not exist in the languages? How can we get more people involved? Do you know of anyone whom we could help ease into this profession?" I spoke with the staff here at the Legislative Assembly, as well, and said that we have a great resource here. We sit I do not know how many weeks a year, a million, and every time we sit, we have Indigenous translators. Is there a way that we can better work together to help train new entrants into the program or help maybe get people interested in translating? There is a lot of work going on in that sense, and that has really been

spurred on by this House. There has been a lot of interest by the Members here who have really been pushing us to do that, and so I want to thank them. Perhaps the deputy minister can offer some more insight, as well.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. Just to build on what the Minister said, we are planning on a meeting with I think there are 33 interpreter-translators that we are aware of kind of on a list of interpreter-translators. They all do different work, but we have a three-pronged approach for that meeting. One is to find out where their specific training needs are because everyone needs professional development and training, so that is one of the objectives of the meeting. The second is to solicit ideas from them as to what kind of initiatives or other things we could do for those who are up-and-coming or taking an interest in going into this field of interpreter-translator. The third is to be able to share with them our current plans under Indigenous language revitalization, the certificate and diploma program as well as get their feedback on some of the other initiatives we are currently running, which is the mentor-apprenticeship program with Indigenous governments across the territories because we feel that this group would really have invaluable insight into that. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, deputy minister. Member Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

**MR. NORN:** Thank you for that. That is good to hear, that there is going to be a meeting with the interpreters in March. It's good to just always bounce ideas off each other and speak with each other and get that camaraderie going. However, it's also important to keep new recruitment in. My next line of questioning, this kind of goes into our polytechnic, bringing that program, having something like a language portion to that secretariat so that we can bring in some new learners and get them to be taught. Like you said, there is a mentorship program. It would be a good idea to get some of our long-time speakers to come in and teach some of the ways of how to translate because, like you said, it's a very specialized area. My question to the Minister is: is there any appetite to do that with the polytechnic? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Minister.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The work that we are doing with the money, the \$600,000 that was provided by the Assembly last year, is developing a program that is beginning as a diploma program. That would be to make adults proficient in Indigenous languages to the point where they could

become interpreters, translators. We envision, after that two-year diploma program, perhaps a third year that could be interpreter-translator training. I have the same vision as the Member, I believe, in terms of utilizing the polytechnic to really become leaders in Indigenous language revitalization. Thank you.

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

**MR. NORN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I know it was before our time, but they used to have the language secretariat. I heard nothing but good things said about it. For whatever reason, the political will at the time just decided to get rid of that. For me, I think that was just a mistake. Anytime you cut funding from language, you are going to have that gap. Now, you are starting to see that. I want to see all kinds of support go towards our translators now to try to keep that going, keep trying to recruit new learners, anybody who is interested in translating, to give them all the supports they need. I am hoping we can do that with what we have here, so that is just my comment. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Mr. Norn. I'll take it as a comment. Any further questions? Minister, do you want to respond?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** I'm happy to respond. It's one of my favourite parts of the department and, I think, one of the most encouraging. We are doing a lot of things to encourage people. We have \$5,000 Indigenous-language scholarships that we provide on top of SFA. We have the Mentor Apprentice Program, which is doing exactly what the Member is talking about, getting people interested. We have rolled out the Our Languages curriculum in schools, which, from what I hear from Indigenous-language teachers, has been very welcome and I think is going to be a very powerful tool to help encourage younger children to take an interest in language. We're also developing the diploma program, as well, hopefully leading into something more.

There really is a lot, right from young to adult, and I am really looking forward to what the future holds. It took a long time to get where we are with Indigenous languages in terms of losing speakers and really the loss of language, and it's going to take a while to get where we want to be. We are taking, I think, the right initial steps to start down that path. It's very encouraging. Thank you.

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

**MR. NORN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I had one question, and it just dawned on me. We had a committee meeting with someone, and we had one

of the translators come in and give some of her input to us in one of the committee meetings. They had a really good point. I think, in terms of compensation, having a scale system for when someone starts out, yes, they will be paid X amount of dollars. When you get your certification, you will get here, but once you start, you could max out at a certain point to make sure that you have incentive for long-time speakers who have done this for a long time and have that sort of scale, at some point. I wonder if the Minister would be interested in doing something like that. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. We are open to everything, and I think meeting with the interpreters will bring a lot of those ideas to the forefront. We don't necessarily, ECE, hire a lot of interpreters. It's places like the Legislative Assembly, it's Indigenous government meetings, it's things like that. Yes, any of those kinds of ideas, I'm happy to look into. The department is very engaged. We have people very engaged with communities on this, so we really get to hear from communities. If the Members are interested, we are more than happy to provide a detailed briefing on the work of the Indigenous languages secretariat, and we've been champing at the bit to get in front of committee on that one. Thank you.

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

**MR. NORN:** Just a final comment. It really is like any other trade. There is a tradecraft here, and I think the Minister is right. There is a mentor-apprentice kind of relationship. For me, it's exciting, and hopefully, we could explore that and go down that road. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member. Committee, we will take a short break and resume.

---SHORT RECESS

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** I now call committee back to order. We were under Education, Culture and Employment, culture, heritage, and languages. Member for Great Slave.

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Just trying to get my head back into where we were, I wanted to maybe just talk a little bit about how I'm really glad to see that none of the funding really has been cut for a lot of this cultural programming. I think that's great. I would have actually been supportive of an increase to the funding. What I look at here, when I look at a lot of these types of programs, is this is an area where we often talk about the lack of P1s and the ability to have

meaningful employment with the GNWT for that group. If we are looking at Indigenous languages, community, cultural type grants and contributions, to me, this seems like a great area in which we could be increasing P1 employment. I am looking at stuff such as the support to northern performers. The department has things that are going to festival organizations and such, which I think might be difficult this year, and I do understand that there will be a move to put things online and be virtual.

I am almost wondering if, perhaps, some of this money could be repurposed towards employment and looking towards hiring people under these types of programs versus giving out grants and contributions all of the time. We would be then working towards building our cultural product for when tourism does return. It's more of a comment than a question, or maybe the Minister could explain what he is doing to look towards that kind of repurposing of this money towards maybe something different in the COVID lens. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Last year, and it's odd to call it last year; it seems like we're still in the COVID year. We had the same situation where there weren't big festivals. What we did is: we were very flexible because there are organizations who rely on this support in order to stay afloat, and there are still things that people can do without getting together. We were very flexible in how we allocated funds to ensure that we still did get out into the community, and they were being spent in the territory. It might not be direct job creation, but it is money circulating. Perhaps, to talk about the plans for this year, I could ask the deputy minister to take a shot at it. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. Just to build on what the Minister said, we do have some organizations that will still depend on funding in order to be able to, once the pandemic is gone or we're in a better position, that they would like to resume as soon as possible many of the events that they host and so on. One of the things that we have seen is that there is a need to support northern performers because so many of them are moving online and collaborating with each other. There is funding that is required for that kind of online presence. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you for that. My comment in a nutshell is just to be more nimble and flexible so

that the departments can support people in transitioning forward. One of the things that I have been hearing a lot, though, from the artist community was the need for actual direct relief funding due to COVID. A lot of them are sort of working part-time jobs and such. Maybe they didn't always necessarily qualify for CERB or things like that. I know that the one funding that was done under ITI had strings attached. It was a project-based one. It was pretty simple. I'm just wondering if the department is looking at ways to maybe repurpose some of this arts funding. Again, I recognize not taking funding from existing organizations, but helping to create some sort of relief funding or less strenuous or arduous funding to access for artists. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. During the last year, we did really, I don't want to say lower the bar, but we made it a lot easier for this to be accessed. I did have a number of FTPs and one-on-one calls with the federal Minister, as well. They did provide some arts relief, but it was not structured for our territory. It was flowed through larger organizations that represent artists, but we don't have such organizations here. I did a lot of advocacy on behalf of that. In the second round of money, I think that there was a bit more flexibility to it, but not to the extent that people would like. To the Member's point, as well, the support for artists is also often support for people's livelihoods, as well, because if you're making and selling crafts, that type of support is needed. I can ask the deputy minister if she has anything else to add. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. One of the things that I can share is the number of applications for the grants. There are a lot of applicants. What else I can say is that these are artists. They're creative, they're flexible, and they adapt really, really quickly. Some of the performing artists are even artists who are working with traditional crafts and so on, very quickly were able to apply a new lens to what they wanted to do. Some of it is online, but some of it is not. I think that one of the signs that we still have a very thriving arts community across the territory is the number of applicants that we get. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you for that. I am trying to also do my best to support NWT artists with my earring purchases and such, so I am glad to hear of the continued support. I am really interested,

though; I noticed you have the Tlicho cultural coordinator position. I note in the notes that it is one-third funded by the GNWT, federal government, and the Tlicho, and I am assuming that that comes out of their arrangement or agreement. Can the Minister speak to whether or not there are going to be further similar type positions funded in different communities for different Indigenous organizations or groups? I think it's a great way, again, to increase employment in small communities, and I am just wondering if there is a plan to expand that out past the Tlicho, as well. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I would have to ask the deputy minister for information on that. Thanks.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Deputy Minister Mueller.

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. This is an example of the self-government agreement. As other governments form self-governments, we would anticipate that similar types of positions would be available and really to support culture and heritage, as well, for that particular self-government. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Just a little bit of a detail with that, would we anticipate that the federal government would always sort of arrange this third-third-third type of situation, or is this something that would be specific to the Tlicho? Where I'm getting at is: would the department ever be heading towards funding these positions themselves for maybe communities that are a long way off from getting to a settled agreement? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Yes, this is very specific to the Tlicho's agreement. I do take the Member's point that perhaps there is more that we can do in communities. That's one of the reasons I have started down the path of looking at what we can do for the heritage centres. While we might not be providing direct financial support for positions in communities, the ECE staff and Prince of Wales heritage centre are always happy to provide assistance, their expertise, to Indigenous governments when it comes to cultural activities in terms of artifacts and things like that. The Indigenous communities are the experts on the culture, but there is expertise that can be lent. We

are providing support in kind whenever we can. Thank you.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you for that. I agree. I would like to see empowerment of the communities. I am excited to see where the heritage centre goes. I just wanted to say that I wanted to get in on MLA Cleveland's tour of the Prince of Wales. I am also curious to see how the artifact preservation stuff is all progressing. I'm not sure that that is under this area, so I'm just going to hit the Minister up for that at another time. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member for Great Slave. I would like to get in on that, too. Minister.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Sure. I think we made the offer a year ago, so I'm glad that people are finally taking us up on it. It is a great tour. To sell other Members on it, when I went there, the staff even pulled some things from the Hay River area, some of the artifacts that no one gets to see because so much of it is really behind the scenes. You get to go and see stuff that the general public isn't lucky enough to see on a regular basis. I recommend it. Thank you.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you for that. I would advise that you bring your colleague, the Minister of Infrastructure, though, because I'm going to ask you about the asbestos and the remediation in the building, as well, when you do that tour. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member. I'll take that as a comment. I think the Minister heard you. Member for Monfwi.

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Masi, Madam Chair. [Translation] ...we have language and culture in place. When we look at this, we look at how many people are working, we can see that. For headquarters, and I'm talking about Yellowknife, it says that there are 404 people in the regional office. In the bigger communities, they have only 11. In total, they have 59. My question to the Minister is: I would like to know how many Indigenous people, even including the Metis and Inuit, as well, are employed? Later on, I'll have another question, after he answers this question. [End of translation]

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I don't know if we have that breakdown at our fingertips, but we can

easily put that together and share it with the Members.

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

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Masi. [Translation] When we look at education, our language, our culture and heritage, I wish that more Indigenous people would be employed or maybe some of the jobs can be transferred to the regions, specifically for this department. When we look at this, we look at who all speaks their language and know their culture. These are the people who should be employed, and it should be in the communities. Madam Chair, I am going to mix my language, in English and in my language, mixed, because sometimes there are a lot of young people who do listen to this session, and I will say it in both languages. [End of translation]

There are 59 employees within this district area division, and it would be easily empowered onto the communities and onto the regions with these positions. Everything is electronic, nowadays, and it would be ideal to have language-speaking people in these positions, as well. I'm not sure how many language-speaking people we have currently in these positions. I'd like to get that number, as well. I would like to see down the road -- it wouldn't happen immediately, Madam Chair -- the headquarters, there is always an increase in positions in the headquarters. We all know that.

There are 48 right now, and in the regional office, there are 11. That's pitiful. Down the road, I'm thinking five years down the road, if the Minister can agree to work toward that, it would be nice to have at least 35, close to 40, maybe, 35 at headquarters and 20 or 25 at the regional office. That number should be changed, and I for one would like to push for that even further. It should be our community experts dealing with this programming, especially the language-speaking people. We are talking about official languages. We are talking about culture and way of life, revitalization of our language. Here, it's all at the headquarters level. That would be my question to the Minister, if he would be willing to look at that, at least as an option going forward, and then I'll continue with my other question, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you to the Member for those comments. Some of the positions in the regions are at the territorial library located in Hay River; the Indigenous Language and Education Secretariat, for the most part located at headquarters. This is also where you'll find the Francophone Affairs Secretariat, which is 14



positions, and that is located in Yellowknife. Then the bulk of the positions are actually the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre staff, and so people who need to be on-site. I understand what the Member is saying. We often, in government, think or say that it's more efficient to run things out of Yellowknife. It's a larger centre, more economies of scale, but if you start breaking it down and all of a sudden you have, instead of a couple of dozen people in a regional centre, you have a couple of hundred, now you have those economies of scale spread across the territory. That's something I'm constantly thinking about. I have regular discussions with my departments about that: how can we put positions in the regions? I appreciate the Member's comments, and we will get him the information that he has requested. Thank you.

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

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Masi, Madam Chair. The Minister has made some moves within the department, within the year. One of them, obviously, that we have been striving toward for quite some time is a partnership with Indigenous governments on their revitalization, the MAP program, which is great. I am optimistic that this Minister will change that number next year. If we are here next year, I am hoping that we have a different line here, different numbers. Obviously, I would like to see some decrease in headquarters and a regional increase, of course. I am glad the Minister is recognizing that.

Madam Chair, just to move on to the language. The Minister and also the deputy alluded to 33 interpreters who are coming in March, the translators and interpreters, to find out what they would require while they are being trained in certain programs. One of the areas that we touched on earlier today is the report that referred to a point of privilege raised by myself in the House. It's public information, now, and there has been a lot of recommendations with that, that came out of it.

One of the discussions that happened was the mentioning of the Language Bureau. We had Mary Rose Sundberg here, the interpreter, who also was a witness to that and made a statement that the Language Bureau should be brought back. Those are experts who are telling this department that we need this back. What else can we say or who can we hear from? We are hearing from the experts themselves, asking for the Language Bureau or a similar type to be brought back, to train those interpreters and translators through Aurora College, where it was once very successful. You have heard from an expert here. There has been other witness, as well; they mentioned the names. I can't remember the other names, but I recognized Mary Rose Sundberg right away. I would like to see more of a Language Bureau discussion. Madam Chair,

we have had some increase in Indigenous language revitalization, \$200,000; another \$6,000 increase, also, into the language area; and \$600,000 towards the Indigenous Language Education Secretariat, towards the implementation of Indigenous languages revitalization initiative.

That's a lot of words. Anyways, it's great that there is an increase in there, but there is nothing specific to training for interpretation and translation. You have to keep in mind that it's totally different from revitalization or the MAP program. It's not the same. I am involved in the MAP program. I know exactly what I'm talking about, and Mary Rose can tell you the same thing and also the other translators who are here today. We are in a desperate need for interpreter language training, and I'd like to know from the Minister, I know it's not part of our budget here today, but as we move forward next year, we are going to be here again. I know there is going to be a discussion in March with 33 experts. We already heard from one of them, or a couple of them, anyways. I would like to see an increase or a particular funding towards a training program for interpreter and translation training in next year's budget. Is that doable? Madam Chair, masi.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I appreciate the Member's passion on this. I think it has only been five years, now, since the creation of the Indigenous Languages and Education Secretariat, so we are making strides. The Member knows exactly what he is talking about: that is focused on revitalization, and the Member is talking about interpreter-translator training. After this meeting in March, we'll see where we go from there. We're not just holding a meeting for the sake of saying that we've done something. If we can come out of that with a plan and that plan requires some funding, that's something that we'll pursue. I'm open to that. I'm definitely open to that. I appreciate the comments. I can't make any guarantees about what will be in next year's budget. We haven't even passed this year's budget, but I recognize the need. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Are there any further questions under the Education, Culture and Employment, culture, heritage and languages from Members? Member for Monfwi.

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Madam Chair, I'm not going to talk on the translation area, but I am interested in the library services into the communities. Public library services \$1.9 million. I understand through the briefings that we've received, there's 21 public libraries in the NWT and 13 communities without public libraries. Fifteen of these are located in

schools, and five are located in other buildings and one in a band office. What are we doing with the 13 without libraries, public libraries? Kids have to read, especially during COVID pandemic. They're staying home most of the time, and we have to have these students learning every day. If they don't have a public library, where do they turn to, Madam Chair? Masi.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Recognizing that there is a need, we've committed to increasing this number by at least three during the life of this government. There is some progress. It's not all of them, but I can tell the Member that much at least. Thank you.

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

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Masi, Madam Chair. I just had to reiterate that when we're here asking questions to the Ministers and the department, we're carrying a message forward from our constituents. It's their voice, and this is what we're hearing throughout the Northwest Territories. I appreciate that Ministers are bringing forward potentially three, and obviously, eventually, we should be capturing all 13 communities. It is very important literacy, reading and writing. The deputy will be supportive of that, too. Teachers, we need to be supporting these teachers. More of a comment, but I just want to appreciate the Minister dedicating potentially three more sites to be initiated. Thank you for that. Masi.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member. Minister, did you have any comments?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Sure. I'll also note that every school has a library. They're all resourced with reading materials for students, but it's not just the deputy minister who is supportive. I am also supportive of the idea of getting public libraries in every community, and three is a first step. Perhaps in the future, we can get down there. We are definitely not adverse to. Sometimes, it takes a community stepping forward and saying they want it, and that really greases the wheels and makes things easier, as well. If there are communities who are really passionate about it, we can work with them, as well. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Members, are there any other further comments, questions? Seeing none. No further questions. Please turn to page 36. Education, Culture and Employment, culture, heritage and languages, operations expenditure summary, 2021-2022 Main Estimates, \$20,799,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, committee. We will now move onto early learning and child care with information on page 43. Member for Yellowknife North.

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Perhaps, I could just get a bit of an understanding of why the early childhood infrastructure fund appears in the operations budget? I believe that would be that our capital budget really only applies to our capital needs, and since this is a fund going to daycares and private infrastructure, it would be in operations. Can I just get confirmation of that? Also a second part of this question is: is there infrastructure for daycares and day homes in the capital budget? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The first part of the question, the answer is: the Member is correct. The reason that it's in here is because this is funding that we distribute to organizations, so it's not our capital. That's why it's not in the capital budget. On the second question: no, three is not capital funding in our budget for daycares. I will note that we have revised school standards, and those standards now allow for the inclusion of early learning childcare space in new or retrofitted schools. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. This is one of my favourite budget lines, and I'm very happy to see the department brought this forward and it's continuing. Before we even get into the conversation of what universal daycare looks like, there's huge infrastructure gaps, and it's huge making sure those spaces exist. I think this is not nearly enough money to close that gap, but on the other hand, the work being done to schools, I think, gives us a lot of that potential. Can I just get a little more information on this funding? Is this, essentially, an application-based fund? Do we have numbers on how many people applied, and how much they were applying for? I just want to get a sense of the need for this fund? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I believe the deputy minister can provide those numbers.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. For 2021, it is application-based. The call actually went out already for the upcoming year to give licensed centres and/or organizations looking to expand or create new space well in advance of opportunity to apply. In the past year, which was the first year of this \$500,000 available infrastructure, there were several applications. Two of them met the criteria, and one was in Fort Smith and the other one in Deline. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The other aspect of this expansion here is the Housing Corporation has now allowed us to open daycares and day homes in their buildings. Can the Minister speak to any work being done to either open, make sure people who want to open a day home in public housing, and/or making sure that public housing has space that actually would meet the regulation requirements? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I don't believe anything's been finalized at this point, but I can ask the deputy minister for details on where we're at and the discussions that have been had. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. As a family day home is a business, private business, when our department staff, we have regional early learning and childcare coordinators in all of our regions. They make themselves available when they hear of anybody even contemplating opening a family day home because of the need. We offer as much information, talk about all the subsidies or funding that they would be available, and also, walk with them through the different health, fire, and different inspections that would take place to look at the actual building. In the past, this was not available to people living in housing, particular housing unit, but now, that will be available. As people are interested, we will help them work through that whole process. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I just also wanted to clarify whether there's other money outside of this? I recognize we subsidize operators, and there's some other, I see a budget line, early childhood contributions. Is there other monies?

Say, if I want to start a daycare or I'm an organization running a daycare and I am looking for millions of dollars to build a new facility, is there other money in the budget to do that or to essentially access, or is this kind of the sum total of it? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. If you are an organization looking to spend millions on early childhood infrastructure, we do not have any money in the budget for you. We have the \$0.5 million infrastructure fund, and that is it. There is not really any other early childhood funding outside of this. However, we do have funding for junior kindergarten and kindergarten through the education budget, and so there are some other items that sort of support this. We also have to look at federal funding. The federal government does have some large pots of money that Indigenous governments can access and have been accessing in the territory to help provide childcare, as well, so there is more than just the GNWT. I know that it is being utilized throughout the territory. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I, too, am really looking forward to seeing changes within public housing happen so that people can take advantage of being a licensed day home provider from within public housing. I find it troubling to know that we tell parents, "You can raise your child in this home, but it's not good enough for you to generate an income from the same environment." I really struggle with that because I think that, largely, that is pointed towards women, who are predominantly the caregiver in a home, and it prevents them from being able to take advantage of some really healthy subsidies that are available to people who choose to open and operate licensed day homes. I do really encourage the Minister to work on that with the Minister of housing because I think that is a great way to increase employment in small communities, for starters, and to open up some much-needed day home spaces and daycare spaces.

Last year, when we sat and did this exact same process, we talked about the different policies within ECE that were frustrating to some day home providers. Some of those were, for example -- sorry, even after school care is a great example, where you can have students in the same school, and they go down to the gym, and all of a sudden the numbers are different. There were a number of policies that we spoke of, and the Minister had shown an interest in changing some of those policies and updating them to provide more

flexibility with childcare providers. I am just wondering what the status of those updates is. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. If I recall correctly, and it's been a while, I think some of those were around safety. A lot of the regulations are in relation to safety. I looked into what other jurisdictions do, and we are not overregulated in terms of safety. We are pretty much on par with other jurisdictions in Canada, so it would hard for me to justify pulling back any of those safety regulations. That is not the answer the Member wants to hear, I imagine, but it's the answer that we came up with. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. No, I would never want you to compromise safety of a child, for sure. I struggle to understand why a child is safe when there is a teacher in the room, and then the teacher becomes an after school care provider and then that room is no longer safe. I think that is where my confusion on the safety point comes from. One of the questions I have is that the early learning and childcare section used to be tied in with the junior kindergarten to grade 12 section, and I am wondering if this is solely a budgetary change or if there was change that also happened within the department physically, as well. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. It is just a reorganization on paper, essentially. It is a significant item, significant enough to be on its own, and so that is why it was separated. There was a lot of that at the department this year. There was a lot of cleaning up, and so that is why there are things in places where they did not used to be and numbers that are different and all of that. I am sure it was a lot of fun for the researchers to go through and try to reconcile that, as it was for our staff to do the work in the first place. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It would not be fair if I did not talk about universal childcare in this section. One of the questions that I have for the Minister is: is there an intent to this fiscal year to produce a cost plan for this Assembly? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I see the Premier looking back at me like, "You had better say yes."

---Laughter

The federal government has shown an interest in creating some kind of childcare model, a national childcare model, potentially something that is similar to Quebec's model, let's say. That is a highly subsidized model, and so I think that we should probably see what we can get out of the federal government at this point and see if we can strike while the iron is hot. I asked the department to look into different options. There will be costs tied to those different options. That is not to say that that would be our plan, but it is a plan that perhaps we can pursue with federal support. We are looking at all options right now. The territory is very unique. There are different barriers in different communities, and so we do not have a one-size-fits-all plan at this point. We do need to come up with a plan that suits all of our communities, and we plan to do that work. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. No, I appreciate that, and I would assume that the federal government might have questions about, if they decided to work with the NWT on it, how much they would potentially be needing to spend. I think it would be important to make sure we are ready for that conversation because I am all about spending the federal money versus our own, for sure. The next thing I would like to talk about is the COVID relief money that was set aside for early learning and childcare, and I am wondering how much of the COVID relief dollars are still available to childcare operators in the NWT. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I just confirmed with the Member that our 2030 Early Learning Childcare Strategy will be done by the end of the year. I expect a lot of the work will be done much sooner than that, and I am happy to keep committee abreast of that situation. I will be handing this over to Mr. Shannon to explain how much money we have spent and how much money we have. I think he might be ready now. Thank you.

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

**MR. SHANNON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. As of December 31, 2020, we had spent, of the \$2.7 million allocated, \$1.7 million.

Forecasted expenditures to March 31, 2021, currently sit at about \$1.9 million, which leaves a variance of about \$800,000. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Mr. Shannon. Member for Kam Lake.

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Is the intent that that money needs to be spent before the 2021-2022 fiscal year, or if there is still money in that bucket come April 1<sup>st</sup>, are day homes still able to take advantage of that come that time? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The money was approved for this fiscal year, and when this money was approved, we were giving our best estimates. If we estimated too high, it means that we did not run out of money, but it means that there will be money at the end that lapses. It's not a case where it's federal money and we have to get it all out the door. It is GNWT money. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much. I am wondering, if that money is not fully subscribed and again that it is GNWT money, if I understood that correctly, the way that that money is delivered to day homes, is there movement in that? Thank you very much.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Perhaps I could ask the deputy minister to answer. Thanks.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister. The money that was allocated for COVID relief was under different categories. Again, as the Minister described, we had to act very fast. We had to try to support our licensed centres in particular and family day homes that were willing to reopen as quickly as possible, so under the categories, it's categories like cleaning supplies and PPE. Also, we wanted to ensure that the staff grant was available, including family day homes for a period of time, as an incentive to stay open.

As well, because our early childhood programs have an attendance basis to the funding, we wanted to make sure that they were getting consistent funding regardless of their attendance in order, again, to be able to reopen quickly and/or

stay open, depending on the number of children in the centre. All of those were very targeted, very specific, to make sure that licensed centres felt that they could safely open, that they had what they needed in accordance with the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer, and that we could respond to families that needed their services. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I see my time is dwindling, so I will be very quick. One of the things that happened is that I, like probably many people, have a lot of essential workers who live in the constituency that I serve. A lot of them were nurses and had to work 12-hour shifts. They ended up, some of them, losing their childcare, and they had to either hire high school students to step in for them, for their children who were no longer in school, or they had to bring family up from down South at a significant cost to their families. There was a fund that was set aside for essential workers that they were not able to tap into if their children were not in a licensed day home, and so, if this money was set aside, or some of it was set aside, for essential workers in order to be able to help them. Some of them had bills all of a sudden upwards of \$3,000 for their family, and so that was quite significant. That is an extreme concern for some of the people who live in Kam Lake, was all of a sudden bills went up and there wasn't a way for them to tap into that fund. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The money was distributed to the day homes and childcare centres that ECE has contribution agreements with. It was not designed to provide support to situations like the Member is describing. In a perfect world, there would be enough childcare spaces with enough availability that no one would have to worry about it, but it was a unique situation. We put the resources we had in the places we thought it would help the most. Thank you.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't have, really, too many questions for the Minister or the department. I just wanted to say that this is an area that, in the future, should he be looking to increase funding, I would be well in support of. There are a lot of studies around the first five years, how the brain is forming for infants and children. Once they already have reached later education parts, they may already have been set up to fail or

to have challenges. That's just more of a comment, that I would like to see a real push to have some of this increased and sort of echoing the comments of my colleagues about flexibility and access to funding. Again, trying to figure out a way that we can be flexible and adaptable when it comes to stuff around the building codes, et cetera, for some of these spaces. I am assuming there are some restrictions or regulations that make it prohibitive for people to have homes or to take in one or two kids to their homes. More just comments than anything. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Did you want to respond, Minister?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Sure, and I thank the Member for her support. I agree; if we want to make a difference in the long-term future of the territory, this is the place to invest the money. Jurisdictions that have universal childcare programs, they see returns on their investment. I think Quebec sees probably a \$6 return, or something, for every dollar they spend. Don't quote me on that, but I think it's in the neighbourhood. I agree. I'll just leave it at that. I appreciate the Member's support, and I share some of her concerns, as well. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Any further questions? Member for Thebacha.

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Thank you, Madam -- I was going to say Speaker. Madam Chair. It's getting late.

---Laughter

I want to go back to the childcare subsidy. I listened to some of my colleagues, and talking about 12-hour shifts and for people who could afford to probably pay the daycare. I also believe in universal daycare but when the time comes. In the meantime, there are low-income students of the future polytechnic university who have to pay the regular daycare as it is if they are going to go to school or otherwise. This is one area that I feel should be based on the threshold based on income, and the childcare subsidy should go to future polytechnic university students who should be subsidized. I think that's the way it should go because we are also trying to make sure that we get the education and the knowledge department much to the level that we want and, to me, that only makes sense. I also wanted to ask, Madam Chair, for him to comment on that first, maybe. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, and I appreciate the Member's comments. While it would be great to

offer everyone free or heavily subsidized childcare, perhaps the money could be better spent in a more focused approach. I know the federal government has announced quite a bit of money for training, and perhaps that's an opportunity to expand some of our early learning training programs at the college and create some sort of partnerships whereby we can use that to add additional childcare. There is nothing solid in place right now, though; I can confirm that. This is a very fast-moving file, and it seems to have picked up speed recently. While there is nothing right now, who knows what the future holds. Thank you.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Madam Chair, \$60 a day for daycare at, say, any childcare facility or anything like that is a lot for a polytechnic student. First of all, they don't get very much in financial assistance, and so then they are trying to manage both things or they have to bring grandma in. That's why I want to ensure that the childcare subsidy to future polytechnic university students is a priority with this Minister. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I recognize that it is something that is needed, given the demographic makeup of Aurora College students and a lot of the income levels in the territory. It is a priority. It doesn't have a budget line associated with it right now, but I recognize the need and hope to be able to make some inroads in the next few years on that. Thank you.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Madam Chair, I was looking at the active positions on page 43. You have 11 positions in headquarters and then one, one, one in each region. This is a good area, also, because we are all very concerned about early childcare. We should at least add one to each region, one more position to the South Slave and one to the Sahtu and one to the Beaufort-Delta. I would appreciate, in future planning, that the Minister consider this change. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. If we succeed in increasing childcare spaces across the territory, I expect that we will see a number of positions spring up in different communities throughout the territory, not necessarily GNWT positions, but definitely employment opportunities. Thank you.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** I have no more questions. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Are there any further questions for Members under the Education, Culture and Employment, early learning and childcare? If there are no further questions, please turn to page 41. Education, Culture and Employment, early learning and childcare, operations expenditures summary, 2021-2022 Main Estimates, \$11,980,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. We are going to skip over to Education, Culture and Employment, junior kindergarten to grade 12 school services, and we will come back to the previous section just for our witnesses' purposes. Turn to page 48 with information items on page 51. Questions? Member for Yellowknife North.

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I've asked previously about this, but I was hoping that I could get an updated figure from the Minister for the public record about how much Jordan's Principle funding is currently in our school system. I fully encourage our district education authorities to go out and get that money, but just an idea of how much money is actually in the system and/or positions. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. We do have those numbers here. Perhaps I can buy some time while our DM looks them up. I can hand it over to our deputy minister to answer that. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Since Jordan's Principle funding became available in the 2018 school year, the Northwest Territories education bodies have accessed nearly \$49 million. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I have very mixed feelings about that figure. It's a great story that we got \$49 million out of the federal government. In other ways, it's clear that our education system is underfunded and there is extreme need, especially for Indigenous students and especially for students with some higher needs.

Can I just get a sense of how many positions that is currently funding? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I don't have that information with me right now, but we can do our best to find out. The deputy minister might have more information. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. If it's okay with the Member, I could describe out of that \$49 million where a lot of the money has gone. The bulk of the money, for example, in our current school year, 2021 school year, nearly \$15 million has gone to fund what we call support assistants. In some schools, they call them classroom assistants, but they are basically adults who are working with children in small groups or one-on-one. Another part of the funding is for specialized services, like specialized education consultants or clinicians where perhaps a community school doesn't typically have access to that. That could be on a child-by-child basis. Some of the funding has gone to other resources. For example, if a child needs specialized resources or equipment, it's gone to that, as well, about \$1.3 million, and then the remaining amount for other staff. That could be for a wide variety of different positions supporting a particular child or group of children. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the deputy minister for those figures. Those support assistants and the needs of those students is some of the most important work that we do. I encourage the Minister and the Premier to make sure that that Jordan's Principle money keeps flowing. It's extremely important to all of the work that we do.

I am looking at the line item for territorial schools and administration. I actually see that there is a \$4 million decrease here from the revised main estimates. Can I just get clarification that that is because we essentially gave a few extra million dollars for COVID relief? Is there any money projected? I don't really see our schools just all of a sudden not having extra costs related to COVID going into this next year. Is there any money to kind of help with COVID relief efforts going into the next school year? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I would like to ask Mr. Shannon to answer that. Thanks.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Mr. Shannon.

**MR. SHANNON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The difference that you will see here in the 2021-2022 Main Estimates is the result of the conversion of fiscal years into academic years. Of the \$13 million that was committed to assist education bodies with COVID-specific costs, 63 percent of that ends up in the revised main estimates, whereas 37 percent ends up in the 2021-2022 to cover the period from April 1<sup>st</sup> through the end of the school fiscal year, which ends in July. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. One last point: I believe the Minister is looking at a possible legislative amendment to make sure that the Yellowknife school districts can align their elections. Since the City of Yellowknife went to four-year election, they themselves remained as a three-year election. However, this just ends up having some costs, and the Yellowknife school districts are now just going to have to pay to run their own elections, where if they lined up, that cost would have largely been shared by the City. There's an extra cost since they got out of sync. Can the Minister just speak to whether there has been any progress on assisting the school boards with that cost and/or aligning the dates? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The aligning of the dates won't be an issue. As for the costs, we have been doing work to determine how much an election would cost. I've been speaking with MACA, with the City of Yellowknife, trying to figure out if we can use enumeration from the previous election or if we have to update it. That was really the significant cost. Perhaps I can hand it to Mr. Shannon, who can give us an update on the most recent developments. Thank you.

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

**MR. SHANNON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. As the Minister alluded to, the legislative amendments necessary to align the election terms are well under way. We anticipate having that in place in time for the fall elections. In terms of costs and enumeration, we have been in touch with the city clerk at the City of Yellowknife who have let us know that we are able to use their existing enumeration. They are working with the

contractor that they use for managing that list to determine the potential costs of that. We have kept YK1 and YCS both in the loop that, once we land on what those numbers look like, we will certainly sit down and hash it out with them to figure out who will cover those costs and what they may be. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. When we met with the Yellowknife school boards, they spoke about a change to their insurance provider, and there was a significant increase in their insurance premiums. Can I just have the Minister speak to how insurance works for schools across the territory? Is Yellowknife unique in owning their assets, and outside of Yellowknife, they would be GNWT-owned? Is this a problem across the territory? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. This is not a problem across the territory. This is problem unique to Yellowknife, but it's a big problem in other jurisdictions, such as Alberta, primarily due, I think, to the floods and fires that Alberta has suffered. There have been significant increases in insurance costs in Alberta, and schools in Alberta are probably paying tens, if not over \$100 million, more a year collectively in insurance costs compared to five years ago. We have seen massive increases in the insurers who have been insuring the Yellowknife-owned schools. There have been some recent developments in that respect, so perhaps for more detail, I can hand it to Mr. Shannon.

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

**MR. SHANNON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. As the Minister alluded to, the previous insurer for Yellowknife school boards was a collective of Alberta. I am sorry. I do not have the exact name, but it was the insurer that all Alberta school boards used across. For that class of asset, their five-year claims class was through the roof a lot due to weather-related issues, so we were experiencing costs through that body. That body has since been wound up, so Yellowknife school boards were left to go to the private market in order to seek insurance. We have been working hand in hand with them to, number one, identify potential solutions to help mitigate those premium costs, whether it be looking at the differences in deductibles and things of that nature, but trying to find the best way forward. They are unique in that they are funded privately as they are owned assets of the two education bodies, so we have been



engaging with colleagues at the Department of Finance in looking at potential avenues through risk management there to try to spread this cost out as evenly as possible and to mitigate it as much as possible going forward. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Perhaps I could just have someone explain to me. My understanding is that schools everywhere else are just GNWT-owned assets, and we self-insure our assets. We do not have this problem of trying to find an insurer. Why are the Yellowknife school districts, why do they own their infrastructure? Is it possible for us to just self-insure the infrastructure like we do everywhere else? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. That is a question that elicits a lot of history, so perhaps I can ask Mr. Shannon if he might have some insight on that. I am not sure.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** All right. Thank you, Minister. Mr. Shannon.

**MR. SHANNON:** Sorry. Thank you, Madam Chair. No, I do not have the full history of that one. That definitely predates me, but it is something that we are working through. As I mentioned before, we are looking at all options, including engaging with those in risk management at the Department of Finance to see if that is a potential opportunity for us. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Mr. Shannon. Member for Kam Lake.

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you to my colleague for bringing up both school elections and the school insurance issue here in Yellowknife. I think that is probably one that you will hear reiterated from every Yellowknife MLA. While I am on the same track, Jordan's Principle is also on my list of things to talk about here today, and I appreciate the figure that was provided by the deputy minister of \$49 million. I think also another piece of that puzzle that is worth notice is that, if you go through the history between 2018, 2019, and 2020, the contributions to the Northwest Territories start at about \$7 million, and then the following year they go to about \$14 million, and then last year they went to about \$28 million. Every year, consecutively, they have been doubling. That, to me, especially when you start talking about where the contributions are going to, says that we really need to beef up our contribution to this section of the budget.

If the federal government all of a sudden decided no longer to fund Jordan's Principle, which we really hope they never ever do, we would be in serious trouble here. We would be losing a huge contribution to our school system. This is one that I encourage the Minister to go back out to FMB and to beef up this portion of the budget if possible. I think that making larger contributions to our kids will pay for itself in spades down the road. I would love to see teachers be able to focus more on teaching and less on some of the other pieces that this money goes to pay for.

In talking to teachers in both the schools that I serve and the riding that I serve, a lot of times teachers are spending a predominant amount of time getting kids ready to learn and not necessarily teaching kids. One of the things that a few of the schools I know in Yellowknife have used Jordan's Principle funding for is a community liaison worker. What that person does is they act as a government-system navigator. They connect families to different programs within the GNWT so that families are better supported so that kids are hopefully in a better position to learn. That reminds me of another position within Health and Social Services, which is, I believe they are called, a family preservation worker within Health and Social Services. In thinking of kind of the child and youth care coordinator program that happened, where Health and Social Services started positions within the schools, I am wondering if the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment is also looking at a similar setup to be able to fund community liaison workers within our schools. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. No, I think that position is unique to Yellowknife, and it's not an ECE position. As far as I know, we are not looking into that. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I will just add that to a list of Member's statements. I appreciate that. You know what, I think I will leave it at that for now. I would appreciate seeing more money in this budget line item for next year. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. Member for Great Slave.

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at some of the contribution funding, such as, in particular, the Healthy Food for Learning line item. I am glad to see that it's still there. I am just wondering if we are not really accounting for the

fact that more and more students are going to be looking to access help as sort of the next while the cost of living does continue to increase for workers if we are starting to claw back income supports, things like that; maybe some federal supports are going to end. I am going to imagine we are going to see an uptake in students accessing supports like that that the school provides, and I do not know if there are others that I am just not seeing here. I guess my question to the Minister is: is there an area or a way that he is looking to find money within the departments to increase supports to the programs that the schools offer to sort of low-income children or children in need? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Things like the Healthy Food for Learning are great programs. I believe that it's part of a package of programs that includes health and MACA as well, and I think that entire package is about a million dollars. It provides food for students and after-school programs, things like that. This program has been around for a number of years, 10 or so, and it has been stuck at \$1 million. It is probably an area that we could see an increase. It is as oversubscribed as programs get. In addition to this funding, schools will also go after any other pot of funding that they can. There are a number of pots of funding from federal government, from third-party organizations. The Member is correct. This is an important pot of money, and it's one of the ones that I am in discussions with the department to see how we can enhance. Thank you.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Before I go any further, I am just going to reiterate that my Kam Lake colleague was correct in that I do also support the discussion around the elections and such that was mentioned and supports for their insurance. I think that is really important, that we continue to fund these. Where I go back to is that teachers tend to be miracle workers. If there is not the money within the funding or the budget to the schools, the teachers are going to be the ones who are going to go out and find the money elsewhere, whether it be out of their own pocket, or they are going to skimp on things that they need, or they are going to buy supplies for their own rooms instead of using that money elsewhere. Again, just more of a comment, just reiterating that this is an area, as well, that I would like to see beefed up. I think that the teachers are front-line support, and the school system is a front-line support, towards a lot of the mental health issues that I have raised already. I would like to see more increased funding and see the Minister go for more. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I appreciate the support. I think the Member is speaking the truth. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Any further questions? No. All right, so I would move on to Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

**MR. NORN:** Marsi cho, Madam Chair. We can look at the numbers and whatnot, but for me, I just have some high-level questions just to the effectiveness of how we are doing business in terms of education. I just want to ask a question to the Minister about graduation rates. I want to see. It ebbs and flows year over year for graduation rates, and we see really high numbers in terms of Yellowknife and our larger centres, but I was wondering if we could get some figures from the Minister for the last five years, just to know how we are doing in terms of graduation rates in small communities. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Graduation rates are one of a number of different measurements that we use. We also have assessments for younger students so that we can see how they are doing when they are younger. The Member is correct that across the board, from the assessments for younger students as well as graduation rates, the numbers are quite high in Yellowknife, high in places like Hay River and Fort Smith to a less degree, and then, there's a significant drop off for small communities. Perhaps the deputy minister might have some more details in terms of numbers. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. As part of our response to the OAG, the OAG had a recommendation that we re-look how we were calculating our graduation rates, and so we did respond. What we found out in all of our work in our correspondence with the OAG is that every jurisdiction in Canada uses a different formula of how they calculate their grade 12 graduation. However, we did align it more with the recommendations of what the OAG asked us to do. That's just a recent change. However, going back to providing our graduation statistics across all of our schools that graduate grade 12, we certainly can provide that to the Member as far back as the Member would like. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, deputy minister. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

**MR. NORN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess that leads onto my next question. I know this probably really closely tied into attendance rates. If we could get that data, as well, see if there's a correlation between that and our graduation rates. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. We will get that, and I'm sure there is a correlation. I'm not sure if the deputy minister has something to add to that. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. There definitely is a correlation. If students are attending school every day regularly, they're not only being able to be there for their actual instruction and lessons, but they get all the other supports that schools make available to them. We do find that the attendance rate does change as well by community by community. We have some schools that have very good attendance rates of, on average, over 85 or 90 percent of their student population, whereas other communities find that their students' attendance rates overall are around 75 to 80 percent. It really is something that we could provide. We do track that in our schools. Thank you.

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

**MR. NORN:** Thank you. Yes, I think it's important to find out, find some solutions. Work with our DEAs to figure out ways to keep our kids coming to school. There is only so much you can do. That means a lot of interaction with parents and that sort of stuff, so I think it's important that we go down that road. That's just a comment.

Just to switch up a little bit, I just heard some comments about insurance. That's back to one I'm familiar with. I've got some areas I'm familiar. I willing to offer my expertise in that, so if you need help with that, I'm very open to help you with that. Other than that, I don't have anything much to add, so I just wanted to touch upon the graduation rates. That's something that's really important to me in the small communities. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Did the Minister have any further comments?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** No, I appreciate the Member's advocacy. It's tough to get kids in school, and it's going to take a partnership with everyone. Families have to be involved. Communities have to

be involved. The government has to be involved, and if we're not being involved in the right way, then we have to change that. Historically, the government hasn't always been involved in the right way in terms of school. Whatever we can do to make those changes, that's what we want to do. Thank you .

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

**MR. JACOBSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Inuit Child First is equivalent to Jordan's Principle. It's federally legislated and only has a five-year agreement to the federal government to the Inuit. What happens when that's not renewed in regards to that, the big picture in regards to the communities that should tap into that funding back home in the Beaufort-Delta? If that's not renewed, that's going to be devastating to the schools that we have up there. There's a thought to the Minister in regards to Inuit Child First program. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, and we're always advocating for continuation of those programs. We recognize the money does flow into communities, so perhaps I could ask the deputy minister for some more detail? Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister. As everyone is aware, the applications for any of this funding is done individually by the education authorities. What ECE tries to do is to provide support, as much as we can, whether it's in the development of those applications, whether it's sharing success stories of, perhaps, one education authority has tried and seems to be successful, making sure that everybody is sharing their experiences with each other.

Also, offering in any way that we can liaison with these different services that the federal government have been providing. Just based on the applications, based on the conversations that our staff have had with education authorities and with the federal departments responsible for sponsoring this, we have not ever had an indication that this funding is going to end. That has not come to our attention or to the attention of our education authorities that we're aware of. That's where it stands right now. Thank you.

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

**MR. JACOBSON:** Just to follow up on that, it's an agreement in place already for five years. I don't know where they're at, what stage they're at, but I guess the Minister and his department should look into seeing where they're at and throw feelers out to their federal counterparts and see if they're going to push forward for another five years, hopefully, and work with them with that.

Going onto another one, if I could, is Healthy Food for Learning for communities that we represent up in the Beaufort-Delta. I hope all the communities and the schools I haven't heard. I've heard all good in regards to Tuktoyaktuk, but in the small communities like Sachs Harbour, Paulatuk, and Ulukhaktok for shipping, you could get a lot less than what you would because of the air freight or how you're getting it in. Just making sure that they're topped up in regards to help for healthy food for the students in the schools. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. My deputy minister can answer that.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Deputy Minister Mueller.

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. The amount that's showing here is the amount that we distribute to the schools to help support their food programs, whether it'd be breakfast, lunch, snack programs, but all of the schools across the North also have other sources of funding to help with their food programs. As you mentioned, there's a Food First. There's national food programs, as well, and often, Indigenous governments are also contributing to this. One of the things that we do from our funding is the cost index is put in there. When the money is distributed across the education authorities, the money that we do fund takes into consideration the various costs of freight and shipping. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Deputy Minister Mueller. Member for Nunakput. Member for Thebacha.

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to say, I have to make some comments here because Fort Smith, my riding, has brought forth many, many MPs, Premiers, and Cabinet Members, MLAs that were all educated in Fort Smith across the Northwest Territories. We have always been known as the education capital of the Northwest Territories and, hopefully, that we will continue to be the education capital for the Northwest Territories in the future. I am very supportive of both schools and always have been.

All my volunteer work, all my work with the Indigenous government for 12 years, has been with the education portfolio with both schools. Of course, every school has some problems, but I have to say that the people that are represented on the DA are very capable people. I am very, very supportive of every aspect of education, because if you don't have a good education, you have nothing. I know that both of my schools in my riding are based on equality, making sure that our children are educated to the very best of their ability. I want to commend the principals and the people who work at the DA office because we don't always agree, but it has been a work in progress, and it has always been positive.

I also want to talk about the Healthy Food for Learning program. When I was the leader of Salt River, we always contributed to the healthy food program at both schools for all of the children, not just for Salt River. We always made sure it was quite a big sum every year. Twice every year, we contributed to this fund, Madam Chair.

The one thing that I want to say that I am not in favour of is that we are not going to start funding elections out of an education fund. I am not in favour of that, and I am not in favour of insurance. I would support my colleagues in any other way when it comes to education, but certainly not that. If I stand alone, I could stand alone, but I take a stand on what I base education on. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Would the Minister like to comment?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Sure. Thank you. The Member is correct that Fort Smith has had a long and successful history with education. There are a lot of great things that have come out of the South Slave DEC, and I have a lot of respect for the chair of the SSDEC who is from Fort Smith. Every time I speak with her, I learn something. I echo some of the Member's comments. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Member for Deh Cho.

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** Mahsi, Madam Chair. Let me start with the Northern Distance Learning program there. It just hits a vein sometimes with that thing. I might be your biggest skeptic on this program here. The reason I use the word "skeptic" is because I think there was a large graduation just recently of the students in my community, and most had taken online courses. Now, none of them have moved on to higher education. I'm not getting any answers from the Deh Cho Divisional Education Council regional superintendent when I asked for their actual grade levels when they have graduated.

That's why I am kind of skeptical about this program, because I think somewhere in your education renewal or something, I think you are really counting on this Northern Distance Learning program to really improve the student outcomes. Like I say, everything is just fine and dandy on paper, but in actual use, like I say, I'm skeptical of this program. I really wish it would work, because the aim is to bring the classroom teacher, maybe somebody from biology or physics or chemistry. Those are the nice big science programs. Our students in the small communities probably can't handle it, but there probably are some that can. I don't even know if those courses are even being taught there. We all know about social passing. I don't know if we're still practising that with this Northern Distance Learning program. It's lots of confidential stuff there, and the regional superintendent doesn't want to share the information with me, but it's going to have to come out somewhere, somehow. It's important.

I'm always trying to see how we could get our students to better themselves, have better education, but we hit these roadblocks. I don't know if it's the people in charge. I'm trying to really work with the kids to get them going somewhere, but I have stumbling blocks. I was of the mindset that, once a student graduates, they should be doing a placement test just to see where they actually are in their grade level, because maybe we can grab them while they're still young and start walking the streets and falling into peer pressure, and we throw them into the adult education learning system.

The upgrading, that's where you're going to have to spend a lot of money, too. If you want a good education, we have to spend money and work on it. We have to do a better job than what we are doing right now. We should be increasing all of these budgets. I wish I could give you all that money so we could see what we can do to help the people in the small communities, because on here, you're saying that you're making academic courses available and whatnot. Maybe I'll just stop there and just let you or your deputy minister, people in your department, comment on that Northern Distance Learning program. Mahsi.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't want to speak to any specific students. I don't want to identify any students here and talk about how they are doing, but I remember, a few years ago, there was an article in the news that Ulukhaktok was having its first ever grad class. Three students, all going to university, all thanks to Northern Distance Learning. I know that the Member is a skeptic, but the proof is in the pudding.

Northern Distance Learning has quite excellent success rates. It's not just an online course. It is much more interactive than that. It's not distance learning; it is bringing a level of education to smaller communities that has never existed before. A lot of students who participate in it do go on to university. The program has been working. It has been getting better every year, and that's why we continue to invest in it. It is one of the bright spots of education in the territory.

There are students in small communities who are struggling, who have issues outside of school that prevent them from really fully committing to school. Then there are students who are fully committed to school, for whatever reason, maybe they just love school, maybe it's an escape for them, and we are giving them an opportunity to take those same courses that are usually only offered in regional centres and allowing them to attend university. There have been success stories.

In addition to just providing Northern Distance Learning, there is also a bridging program where students normally travel to a university and learn about the university experience. It's more than just the academic side. It is a very successful program. I have to say that, and I have to defend the program. I hope that, despite the Member's concerns, he is still supportive of the budget. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Member for Deh Cho.

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I support anything you guys do, but I will always have a skeptic mind. Somebody has to ask questions. I see you have a very big budget and everything. Your academic courses, I don't know, you did not explain anything like that, but you have got success stories. I get that. We probably have success stories in my community, too, but nobody is sharing that information with me. I am wondering about your education renewal. It says you do contributions to the teachers' association and education bodies to make changes to the education system to improve student achievements. Does the department receive any reports of any kind that they can review to see those goals are being attained? Mahsi.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Perhaps I can ask the deputy minister. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Deputy Minister Mueller.

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I hope I understood the question clearly. I interpreted as: the professional improvement through our collective

agreement with the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association, do we have any reports? I just want to clarify if that was the question that needs to be answered.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Member for Deh Cho, is that clear?

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** Yes. Like I was saying, we have contributions being provided through the educational partners such as what is listed as the NWTTA, that is on page 51, and education bodies, it says. I don't know who those would be, but it's to make fundamental changes to the education system in order to improve student achievement in the NWT. I was asking if the department receives any reports from them and reviews them to see if we are meeting those goals. Mahsi.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member. Would you like me to just direct it to the Minister?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. We are looking at the education renewal and innovation contributions provided to educational partners like the NWTTA and the education bodies to make fundamental changes. There are a number of metrics associated with that. We do have an evaluation division that recently evaluated a lot of our efforts under there, and there was a report released a little bit earlier than the Auditor General's report, and it came to a lot of the same conclusions in terms of outcomes, but it also showed that the programs that were evaluated were successful, often. That included an evaluation of things like Northern Distance Learning. There are a number of other evaluations, and I will speak to each one. I am just kidding.

--Laughter

I will leave it at that, thank you.

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

**MR. NORN:** Madam Chair, I move that we rise and report progress.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Do I have to make a motion? Okay. I am rising and reporting progress.

**MR. SPEAKER:** May I have the report, please, 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; Tabled Document 286-19(2), Main Estimates 2021-2022 and would like to report progress with one motion adopted, and, Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Do we have a seconder? Seconded by the Member for Yellowknife North. All those in favour? All those opposed? Any abstentions? 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 Wednesday, February 10, 2021, at 1:30 p.m.:

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Replies to Budget Address (Day 5 of 7)
7. Returns to Oral Questions
8. Acknowledgements
9. Oral Questions
10. Written Questions
11. Returns to Written Questions
12. Replies to Commissioner's Address

13. Petitions
14. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
15. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
16. Tabling of Documents
17. Notices of Motion
18. Motions
19. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
20. First Reading of Bills
21. Second Reading of Bills
22. 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
23. Report of Committee of the Whole
24. Third Reading of Bills
25. Orders of the Day

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Wednesday, February 10, 2021, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

