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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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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>MINISTERS' STATEMENTS</b> .....	<b>1903</b>
109-19(2) – Improvements to COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat (Cochrane) .....	1903
110-19(2) – Unauthorized Occupancy (Thompson) .....	1904
<b>MEMBERS' STATEMENTS</b> .....	<b>1905</b>
Economic Compensation for Trappers (Norn) .....	1905
Trades (R. Simpson).....	1906
Economic Outlook (Bonnetrouge) .....	1906
Environmental Remediation and Economic Recovery (O'Reilly).....	1907
Sachs Harbour Airport (Jacobson).....	1907
Housing Policies and Legislation (Cleveland).....	1907
Regional Economy (Semmler).....	1908
Women Driving the Economy (Nokleby).....	1908
Economic Recovery (Johnson).....	1909
Whati All-Season Road (Lafferty).....	1909
Eulogy for Jim Weaver (Thompson).....	1910
<b>REPLIES TO BUDGET ADDRESS</b> .....	<b>1910</b>
<b>ORAL QUESTIONS</b> .....	<b>1911</b>
<b>TABLING OF DOCUMENTS</b> .....	<b>1922</b>
<b>NOTICES OF MOTION</b> .....	<b>1922</b>
28-19(2) – Amendments to the Rules of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly.....	1922
<b>CONSIDERATION IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE OF BILLS AND OTHER MATTERS</b> .....	<b>1923</b>
<b>REPORT OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE</b> .....	<b>1943</b>
<b>ORDERS OF THE DAY</b> .....	<b>1943</b>



## YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Wednesday, February 10, 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, Mr. Rocky Simpson, Hon. Shane Thompson, Hon. Caroline Wawzonek

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

**SPEAKER (Hon. Frederick Blake Jr.):** Member for Yellowknife Centre.

**POINT OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE**

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Rule 21(1) of the Rules of the Legislative Assembly to make a personal explanation. Yesterday during question period, during an exchange with the Member for Great Slave on question 526-19(2): Medical Detoxification Services, I made the following statement, "She has been soliciting horror stories on Facebook and, apparently, has been very gratified with that." The subsequent exchange with the Member for Great Slave further led me to raise a point of order.

Mr. Speaker, I am a long-time advocate for mental health issues in the Northwest Territories and supporting residents who need help is important to me. However, upon further reflection and having reviewed the Hansard transcript from yesterday's exchange, I acknowledge that my comments went beyond the ordinary and healthy level of tension between Regular Members and Cabinet that is practised in this Chamber. I would like to withdraw my remarks and apologize to the Member and to the House. Mr. Speaker, I further wish to withdraw my point of order. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**SPEAKER'S RULING**

Colleagues, I want to thank the Member for Yellowknife Centre for her words. Heated debate and strong words are to be expected in this place. When we step over the line, it is important that we take responsibility for our words and actions and make amends. Thank you for the respect you have shown to your colleagues this afternoon and to this institution.

Colleagues, one of the first things we're told when we first come here is that we have the right to say whatever we want in this Chamber. That is true, but we have, through our own rules, placed our own limits on what we can and can't say. Those rules

are made in the North, and they are different from what we see in party-based systems to the South. We operate by a higher standard here, and I will do my best to hold us to that standard in a fair and impartial way.

Events of the last year are taking their toll on all of us, both in this Chamber and in the communities we represent. Residents are on edge and suffering. Many have lost loved ones and haven't been able to grieve properly. We are separated from friends and family, worried about the safety of ourselves and our neighbours, and anxious for life to return to something closer to normal. The dark and cold winter months are not helping. I ask each of you to make a commitment to yourselves and to each other to use respectful language and actions in this House. It is okay to disagree, but let's try harder to do it without being disagreeable. Most importantly, let's show strength and courage in this place by modeling the behaviour we want to see in our communities. Our words and actions matter. As MLAs, we need to demonstrate leadership through these challenging times and show that we can lean on each other and work together to get through them. Thank you, Members. This matter is now concluded. Item 2, Ministers' statements. Honourable Premier.

**Ministers' Statements**

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 109-19(2):  
IMPROVEMENTS TO COVID-19 COORDINATING  
SECRETARIAT

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Government of the Northwest Territories established the COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat, we committed to bringing our pandemic services under one roof to improve our services and seek cost efficiencies. I am proud to stand here today and say we have done what we said we would do. Jurisdictions that established travel restrictions and made early efforts to protect their residents have shown the most success in limiting the number of COVID-19 cases. As the second wave has forced many jurisdictions into lockdowns and implementing stricter measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, we have not. Despite a record high number of cases around the world, a surging

second wave, and recent new variants, our territory continues to successfully contain COVID-19, due in large part to residents and businesses doing their part and following the orders of the Chief Public Health Officer.

Our government's proactive move to establish the secretariat has also played a significant role in our ability to limit the spread of the virus in the Northwest Territories. Consolidating the government's pandemic response has allowed the secretariat to view operations through a wide-angle lens. The result, Mr. Speaker, is coordinated and improved pandemic services that thousands of residents have relied on during this pandemic. This has allowed us to protect the health and well-being of our communities and the integrity of our healthcare system. The secretariat has been able to expand services, purchase in volume for efficiencies, and more effectively support communities and the healthcare response led by the Chief Public Health Officer.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to share some examples of the operational efficiencies, coordinated services, and communications expertise the secretariat has brought to the Government of the Northwest Territories' pandemic response. The Government of the Northwest Territories amalgamated our Compliance and Enforcement Operations into a single entity from what used to be three departments. This allowed us to move to dedicated full-time officers, which has increased the effectiveness of compliance and enforcement functions.

Our ProtectNWT and 811 Information Line operations have been combined into one business area to deliver more efficient and consistent services, greatly decreasing the wait time for individuals requesting services. Expanded software and technological capacity now allow us to route telephone calls to employees whose skill sets and expertise are most relevant to questions.

In November, we announced that we would change our approach to who pays for isolation centres. We heard from Indigenous leaders, community governments, the business sector, and residents that we needed to find a way to reduce these costs, which made up half of the secretariat's budget. The new policy, which came into effect in January, requires residents to pay for isolation centre stays resulting from discretionary travel. Since this change, we have seen a significant decrease in isolation centre stays, which in turn means a considerably reduced expenditure for taxpayers.

We recently completed a transparent public tendering process and awarded 76 standing offer agreements to NWT businesses providing lodging, transportation, food services, and security to

isolation centres. These agreements will allow us to better serve guest needs and involve more northern businesses in delivering our services while reducing costs.

Mr. Speaker, the people and businesses of the NWT are resilient and have found ways to adapt during the pandemic. The secretariat has positively contributed to our government's ability to better protect NWT residents and safeguard our economy, while allowing other departments to focus on their mandates and continue to deliver on the important priorities of the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, honourable Premier. Ministers' statements. Minister of Lands.

#### MINISTER'S STATEMENT 110-19(2): UNAUTHORIZED OCCUPANCY

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall, I spoke to you about how enforcing the rules on how public land is used is a critical part of making sure that land and resources in the Northwest Territories are well-managed. We know that unauthorized occupancy, or squatting, is a longstanding land management issue across the Northwest Territories and has been for over 50 years. The Government of the Northwest Territories has taken steps to address this issue since taking over the responsibilities for land management after devolution. Last fall, I highlighted that we have stepped up our enforcement efforts to act upon all unauthorized occupants identified since devolution. The department often receives reports of unauthorized occupancy from the public. We appreciate these reports and follow up on the information provided, taking legal action toward removal where appropriate.

Today, I am here to share with you the approach that the Department of Lands is taking to address the historic unauthorized use of public land. Specifically, Mr. Speaker, I would like to share our plan to address the unauthorized structures that have existed outside of the built-up area of communities since before devolution. It is now time to take action to tackle this difficult issue within the life of the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly.

Unauthorized cabins built before April 1, 2014, will all be evaluated on a case-by-case basis against standard criteria. These criteria are based on our land management practices, legislation, and policy and include items such as how far a cabin has to be from the water and highways, the maximum footprint and size of the buildings, and whether or not the land is available. If the structures do not meet the criteria, the department will initiate legal action to seek removal. If the structures meet the criteria, the occupant may be able to apply for a

lease, which will then undergo consultation with Indigenous governments and organizations.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember that the Government of the Northwest Territories does not condone the unauthorized use of land. From the outset, the Government of the Northwest Territories has recognized that some untenured cabins, both new and old, may be associated with Indigenous occupants who are exercising their asserted or established Aboriginal or treaty rights. We will continue to work with occupants and Indigenous governments and organizations to identify and confirm these potential rights-based cabins. These cabins will not be subject to current evaluation or further legal action at this time. Instead, the department will continue to work with Indigenous governments and organizations to identify these structures and work toward an appropriate process for potential rights-based cabins in future. This is a separate but important stream of work that I have committed to work on collaboratively with Indigenous governments.

As lands inspectors post initial notices on all untenured cabins across the Northwest Territories, occupants who receive notices are encouraged to follow up with the department directly. Contact information as well as information on how to identify if a cabin may be associated with an Aboriginal or treaty right will be attached to the initial posting notice and available on the department's website.

Mr. Speaker, this is a big undertaking, and it will take time. We estimate there are upwards of 700 untenured structures on public land, and it will take time to reach every untenured structure on public land across the Northwest Territories. We are getting tough on those who are breaking the law and who have no legal right to build on public land, but we also need to follow due process and do it right. We also need to ensure the process respects Aboriginal and treaty rights.

The Government of the Northwest Territories recognizes the need for residents to access and enjoy the land, now more than ever. This plan is about making a difference for residents of Northwest Territories and bringing about transparency and accountability for access and use of public land for everyone. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Members' Statements

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ECONOMIC COMPENSATION FOR TRAPPERS

**MR. NORN:** Marsi cho, Mr. Speaker. I would like to revisit my Member's statement from last week regarding a flooding in the Taltson and Slave River areas. I am doing what I can to advocate for the harvesters in the area to help them recover lost revenue, equipment, and inability to practice their harvesting rights and livelihoods simply because of the environmental disturbances that are occurring in the area.

Mr. Speaker, today's theme was on the economy. Today, I will speak to the traditional economy and the economic force that was once the backbone of the NWT; that's the fur industry. I did mention last week that this is now largely a supplemental and cultural practice. To many of us, it might not seem too impactful, but it really affected me and my constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to share a short story about my upbringing. My great-grandfather hunted and trapped all of his life in the area and worked right up until the day he passed on. I remember, as a small child, waiting for him at home in the window of our small little house in Deninu Kue, a little half house in the middle of a winter storm. I also recall him being ecstatic when he rolled up in a little small Elan skidoo, a very efficient machine that got through any sort of storm. I wish that machine would run like our government, but it is what it is.

From here, he would bring his catches of muskrats, beaver, martin, and lynx. I also remember how hard he worked, and I remember going with him to the base and bartering with the manager to get the best price on his furs and get as much money for his family. It was like this for many generations, but of course, times have changed. I want to let you know that trap season, for a lot of my constituents, is a wash. It's done. The cost of living is much higher in our smaller communities, and any income helps pay the bills and put food at tables.

I'm really concerned about this, and I want to drive this point home. How would we feel if we lost our next paycheque? I imagine, for a lot of us, it would be an inconvenience, and many of us would go on with our daily lives. For our people in the small communities, it's much more devastating.

Mr. Speaker, later today, I will table a document that shows some of the photos in greater detail of the damage that occurred. I also want to speak to the loss of equipment and damage to cabins. One image last week was a cabin sitting partially submerged in ice. Since that time, I was given more photos in the area. Mr. Speaker, I got to see some of the sentimental damage this causes, as well. Aside from camp gear, a lot of keepsakes were damaged, too. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

**MR. NORN:** Thank you, colleagues. Continuing on, a lot of items passed down for parents and grandparents were lost and damaged. No monetary payment can replace these losses. Another image that stood out was photo of an old .30-30 lever-action rifle, I bet it could tell a lot of stories, which was damaged irreparably.

Mr. Speaker, I am hoping this government and particularly the Department of ENR can step up to the plate and do everything it can to assist my constituents and keep this tradition alive and strong into the future. With that, Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources at the appropriate time. Marsi cho, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Members' statements. Member for Hay River South.

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON TRADES

**MR. ROCKY SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All of us are aware of how cold it has been this past week. We all felt it, and some of us probably experienced issues in our homes and with our vehicles. Losing our heat or power, having our water and sewer pipes freezing or our vehicles not starting or breaking down on the highway in the middle of the night is not a good feeling.

We are fortunate that, in this building, there are staff responsible for ensuring the building is warm and all utilities are in working order, a luxury the homeowner does not have and even less so in the communities outside Yellowknife.

What happens when issues arise due to the cold weather? We are fortunate that we have a group of trades and service people such as plumbers, electricians, gas-fitters, oil-burning mechanics, carpenters, mechanics, water-delivery personnel, sewer pump-out personnel, and tow-truck driver operators at our disposal, although somewhat limited in numbers.

When an emergency arises, we as residents understand the value of the trades and essential services. We expect these trades and service persons to attend to our emergencies no matter how cold it gets or what hour of the day it is. They are often forced to work in weather most of us want nothing to do with. I would ask the residents of the NWT to be understanding and not demanding when requesting services during weather-related emergencies. As there are only a limited number of trades and service providers to address cold-weather issues, they have to prioritize the requests

coming in and need our understanding and cooperation. Because of the importance and limited number of essential personnel who look after us during cold-weather emergencies, I will have questions for the Minister of Education. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Hay River South. Members' statements. Member for Deh Cho.

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Staying on the economic outlook for the Northwest Territories, Mr. Speaker, I would like to paint a picture of some of the actions taken by this government to place our territory in an unstable situation economically.

The GNWT only collects approximately \$2 million a year in royalty or taxes from the diamond mines. The diamond mines extract approximately 14 million carats every year of diamonds, which could equate in the hundreds of millions of dollars, even billions, and all this is shipped out of the Northwest Territories, never to be seen again. In the Finance Minister's budget address, there was no mention of the diamond mines' financial contributions, through royalties or taxes, to our bottom line.

This government has also lowered the small business tax from 4 percent to 2 percent, further lessening the revenue stream to our bottom line. Even the much-touted Business Advisory Council lost faith in the GNWT, stating they were just not serious enough about the economic recovery plan for the Northwest Territories, so now we have no movement nor any clear direction as to economic recovery or our economic future. Even my dog left me. I don't know how much worse this can get.

---Laughter

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance stated she is cautiously optimistic about the future of our economy and fiscal outlook. I, too, will remain cautiously optimistic in the hopes we can pull through this turmoil and show the residents of our territory that we are serious about our economic future and fiscal outlook. There are many ways to accomplish this feat or, at the very least, to try. There has to be a willingness to all work together in this House and butt heads for the betterment of our residents and for our economic future. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON  
ENVIRONMENTAL REMEDIATION AND  
ECONOMIC RECOVERY

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. On April 17, 2020, the federal government announced \$1.72 billion in financial assistance for the remediation of orphan and inactive oil and gas wells in Western Canada as part of Canada's economic response plan for COVID-19. On May 28<sup>th</sup> and October 14<sup>th</sup>, I made statements in this House about the potential for the NWT to access similar funding, working in partnership with Yukon and Nunavut. As I understand it, the requests from our government keep getting pitched as support for the mining or petroleum sectors. Clearly, this approach is not working as no federal investment has materialized after eight months. Regular MLAs met recently with the Office of the Regulator of Oil and Gas Operations, and there are no abandoned wells or infrastructure that does not have a clear owner that is still in business. The one exception may be the infamous Cameron Hills sour gas field that is hurtling towards us and should have been prevented. I will keep pushing our government to make the main focus message about an accelerated remediation program for northern contaminated sites not a bail-out for the resource sector.

To repeat what I said in May and October, the federal contaminated sites inventory shows 1,647 sites in the Northwest Territories, with an estimated assessment of remediation costs at \$12.375 billion, about six times our annual budget. The GNWT 2019-2020 public accounts show a total of 278 sites under our jurisdiction that may require remediation, with a cost of \$75 million. This work could be fast-tracked under a regional accelerated remediation program for the North, with the added benefits of environmental protection and capacity building for other work, like Norman Wells and the polytechnic university; in other words, building a remediation economy. Later today, I will have questions for the Premier on why there has been no visible progress on securing federal investment in an accelerated contaminated sites remediation program. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON  
SACHS HARBOUR AIRPORT

**MR. JACOBSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, Mr. Speaker, I am bringing up our Sachs Harbour airport. As far as I am concerned, this is a good-news story because of the work that is going to be done there this coming summer. With the Minister of Infrastructure, this could be a great news story if she just says yes. The mayor of Sachs Harbour,

Mr. Speaker, has written me to ask me to bring forward in the House if we could have the Hamlet of Sachs Harbour be able to do the work that is required on that contract this coming summer. They want a chance to do the work that is being planned on the upgrades at the airport. It includes ditch maintenance, services, and repair; the removal of water from ponds; grading to promote better drainage and safety of the aircraft that are coming in, supporting the community.

The hamlet worked for the GNWT airports division, and the airport was built in 2000. They have worked to this day, 2021. They want to continue this partnership, Mr. Speaker. They have the equipment and the ability to finish this project using local people and their own equipment. This will save our government money. It will be creating jobs in Sachs Harbour for local people. It's a win-win situation for the hamlet. Mr. Speaker, we have to promote our local hamlets to try to provide work, and I am really hoping the Minister does say yes when I will have questions for her at the appropriate time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON  
HOUSING POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe housing is a human right. Safe and secure housing is the foundation for healthy communities and is required for all residents to be successful parents, reliable employees, and contributing citizens. When Avery missed rent payments, a notice was emailed. When Avery was disrupted, the LHA identified the behaviour needed to change and put their client on a payment plan. When no change occurred, Avery was asked to sign a last chance agreement. Rent didn't stop getting paid due to laziness, and disruptions weren't just because. At no point did the local housing authority connect Avery to government supports outside of their office.

Given the importance of housing to social and individual wellness, I expect the Housing Corporation to empower its local housing authorities to provide trauma-informed, client-focused service. It is clear from Avery's experience that they do not. They are run like a government-backed landlord. They are not expected to link struggling tenants to social supports which are often not available without government referral. They lack the policy to mandate their support. They do not appear to maintain relationships with other social departments and non-profit organizations. Housing Corporation mandate does not identify its responsibility as a social envelope department, but this must be changed.

Not all public housing clients can be the perfect tenant expected by the Rental Tenancies Act. They need support. Housing authorities need to be guided by the practices of care that identify red flags and connect clients to resources to help them be a better tenant and remain in healthy, stable housing. Through the integrated case management model, the GNWT is moving toward modern service delivery designed to meet Northerners where they are at. People need access to supports, and this government needs to make those supports more accessible. Without including a front-line housing organization that cares for and connects these clients, the overall approach will be lacking, and we will still be having these conversations for decades to come.

Homelessness derails sobriety, separates families, destabilizes employment, and wreaks havoc on the physical and mental health of NWT residents. It is difficult and expensive to help people recover from homelessness. Chaos is costly, Mr. Speaker, and prevention is key. It is time for this government to move the Housing Corporation upstream. It is time for it restructure and evolve to support the wraparound care model that the GNWT is already working to put in place. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON REGIONAL ECONOMY

**MS. SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The college in Inuvik is empty, as the Minister probably remembers when he visited. We have all the ingredients to grow a research economy in Inuvik. We are witnessing changes in the land from our climate. We have an all-season road that connects us to the ocean, an abundance of oil and gas resources, a satellite station, and an expanding runway. We are well-positioned to be the hub that services researchers to the Arctic and to train our own people to be the leaders in areas not limited to climate change adaptation, Arctic environmental sciences, cold weather testing, energy innovation and conservation, as well as Arctic policy and governance.

Mr. Speaker, our community is at an economic tipping point. We struggle with high utility and heating prices, rising unemployment, and a small population and a decreasing business sector. Oil and gas has not materialized to its full potential. I am concerned about the future of the polytechnic transformation and how that will impact Inuvik's local economy.

Will the transformation of a polytechnic stimulate our people to educate themselves to obtain local

jobs built upon the assets that we have in the western Arctic, to grow our regional economy? Will the transformation of the polytechnic position the western Arctic to be the lead in climate change? Will the polytechnic build on strength of our region to position the western Arctic as the hub for the Arctic reserve and development? I want to see our campus full, and I want our people enrolled in educational courses that will lead to economic development in our community. I will have questions for the Minister of ECE later today.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Member's statements. Member for Great Slave.

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON WOMEN DRIVING THE ECONOMY

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2019, Canadian women aged 15 years and older represented nearly half or 47.4 percent of the labour force compared to 37.6 percent in 1976. Canadian women over the age of 15 accounted for 61.4 percent of the national workforce in 2019. In January of this year, according to the NWT Bureau of Statistics, the Northwest Territories recorded the lowest unemployment rate in Canada at 5.9 percent. Conversely, our employment rate increased to 65.8 percent, the second highest in the country behind the Yukon with the largest growth being seen in the public sector.

With all of these new jobs created, I can't help but ask myself, "How many of these jobs are going to priority hires such as women or Indigenous Aboriginal employees?" Employment of Indigenous Aboriginal people, or P1s as they're designated in the GNWT's Affirmative Action Policy, has been stagnant at around 30 percent for decades. When compared to the 2016 census statistic that shows 50.7 percent of our population is Indigenous, it is clear we still have a lot of work to do.

There are programs in place to ensure the success of northern hires such as the Indigenous Career Gateway Program, the Regional Recruitment Program, and the internship program. However, how effective are they? Are we seeing an increase of Indigenous employees in the public sector? Are we seeing more women? What are the metrics in place to measure the success of these programs? Are we even looking at the barriers to accessing them, or do we simply pat ourselves on the back for offering them, without determining if they're really effective?

Sometime soon, we are anticipating the rollout of the GNWT's new cultural awareness and sensitivity training. This mandatory training for all GNWT employees is very timely, given the recent increase in hiring. It is my hope this training will help to

remove some of the barriers to advancement for Indigenous people.

While the promotion of women is near to my heart, no surprise to anyone in this room, we cannot have a conversation about employment in the Northwest Territories without discussing how our economic downturn is also hurting Indigenous men. Industries that are traditionally male-dominated such as recreation, forestry, fishing, mining, and oil and gas are all experiencing a sharp decline due to the impacts of the coronavirus. Employment for men in the NWT has dropped by about 200 positions. What are we doing to ensure that men have equal access to employment in both the public and private sector? How do we not fail them while raising others? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ECONOMIC RECOVERY

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are at an important time in our history, and I believe COVID-19 brought food security to its limits on a global scale. California, where the majority of our food comes from, is experiencing increased droughts and pressures. Desertification is increasing around equatorial regions in the world, and the growing season is pushing further and further north. Many countries and areas around the world have capitalized on this.

In Russia, for example, half of their food comes from backyard gardens, and every citizen is entitled to two to five acres for free farmland in which they can build a house on it. Just next door in the Yukon, there has been a longstanding program that gives out farmland for those who will farm it. The 2016 census reported 142 farms operating in the Yukon. The NWT, on the other hand, has 16.

Mr. Speaker, whether it be the Inuvik greenhouse, McNeely's Nursery, Arctic Farmer, Riverside Growers, Nifty, Polar Eggs, Green Enterprises, or Deh Cho Gardens, there are models that are working in the North, but we have a long way to go. One of the biggest barriers and obstacles in this area is access to land, Mr. Speaker.

We still do not have an agricultural lease. We still do not have commercial leases that allow you to live on it, despite almost everyone who has farmed for all of history, lived on those farms.

Mr. Speaker, I believe people often shun the idea that we can expand the agricultural industry in the North. They go, "It's too cold," and kind of shrug it off as not an economic driver. I would rather take

one business that can employ five people and replicate it to every single community than I would take a business that employs 150 people. I believe we have models, and we need to expand this into the North.

Mr. Speaker, whether it be the reindeer herd in Inuvik or what we see in Alberta, northern bison farming, there are plenty of options to expand into this to ensure we have food security. It creates a low barrier entry for work. The South Slave is filled with rich, arable land. I will have questions for the Minister of Lands of what we are doing to actually make sure we end up with more farming and more agricultural. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON WHATI ALL-SEASON ROAD

**MR. LAFFERTY:** [Translation] Masi, Mr. Speaker. Today, about the all-season road to Whati, there will be an opening of that all-season road, so when we take a look at it, that would be Highway No. 9, there will be a celebration. Today, is the government on both sides will be working together? What I'm trying to say is: having businesses along that new highway, because we know that would benefit the people on both sides, as would be having camps or a park. [End of translation]

This is an important milestone for the people of Whati. This month, we celebrate the completion of the long-awaited Whati all-season road. This is a great accomplishment for the Tlicho people; the Tlicho, the territorial governments, and the community of Whati. The road will certainly lower the cost of food in Whati. It will unite families. It will make doctors' visits easier and improve access on the land. It also raises the possibility of new industry for Whati, one that can create jobs, one that will better people's lives. I am referring to community-based tourism, an industry that plays perfectly to the talents and skills of our Indigenous people, the Tlicho people.

Mr. Speaker, the natural beauty and wildlife of the riches of the Whati region guarantees that visitors will certainly be visiting the community of Whati. Whether tourism contributes to the greater good of the people of Whati depends on the territorial government. At the appropriate time, I will ask questions to the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment. Masi.

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

**MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON  
EULOGY FOR JIM WEAVER**

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, I stand in the House to inform you that Jim Weaver, a former teacher of Fort Simpson, passed away on November 24, 2020. Jim was born on October 15, 1941. As a young teacher, Jim travelled North in 1966 with his wife, also a teacher, to Iqaluit and Pangnirtung, where they spent 10-plus years teaching. It was here he developed his love for the North while spending his time on the land hunting caribou, ptarmigan, and fishing char with the local residents. It wasn't long before he had his own snow machine and qamutit.

In 1978, he had the opportunity to bring his young family to Fort Simpson, where he would continue teaching for the remainder of his career. He enjoyed being part of the community and, most of all, the school, bringing elements of the land into his classroom, where his students would learn the biology of local fish and wildlife, including how to trap, skin, and clean them for subsistence. He was also known for his assortment of animals in his classroom and engaging teaching lessons, no matter the subject. He also had a passion about bringing his students onto the land, where they could learn through their own hands-on experience. His Dr. Kelly camps are remembered by many. Most importantly, his former students now span across the North, taking some of those powerful experiences with them.

After retiring, he stayed one more year so that he could enjoy a few more trips hunting and fishing on the beautiful Mackenzie River and not have to return home on a Sunday night for school the next day. Bringing home a moose was his greatest highlight. Finally, after 21 years in Fort Simpson, almost 30 in the Northwest Territories, in declining health, it was with much sadness he returned to his home town of Doaktown, New Brunswick.

His time in the North created experiences and memories he cherished deeply and will never be forgotten by his family, whom he shared them with. He leaves behind his wife, Joan; son, Kevin; and daughter, Sharon; and four grandchildren. He will be sadly missed by his friends and family, and he had a huge impact on our community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Nahendeh. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family. Members' statements. Item 4, returns to oral questions. Item 5, recognition of visitors in the gallery. Item 6, replies to the budget address, day 5 of 7. Member for Thebacha.

**Replies to Budget Address****MS. MARTSELOS' REPLY**

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, I am going to provide my response to the 2021 budget address, which was tabled by the Minister of Finance on February 4, 2021. In preparation for my budget reply today, I reviewed my remarks from last year's budget reply, along with my remarks from my response to the Commissioner's address delivered last May. Oddly enough, much of what I said last year in those two speeches is largely still how I feel right now about the budget before us today.

Mr. Speaker, as a Member of this Assembly with over 50 years of business experience in the private sector, my strengths and main concerns rest with the economy. First of all, this budget does not provide any long-term solutions to address the growing deficit we have. Perhaps the government will address this issue in future years under their proposed government renewal strategy, but this is something that has to be addressed and done so in a balanced way.

Unfortunately, at the moment, our government does not have a concrete plan for the territory's economic recovery from the effects of COVID-19. I understand the Premier will be sharing a draft framework for a recovery plan with MLAs during this session, which I welcome and am looking forward to reviewing. However, I urge the Premier and Cabinet to accelerate the work being done in this area and to make the recovery plan available to the public as soon as possible. Doing so would help reassure both the public and the business community.

Mr. Speaker, stronger emphasis must be placed on the economy in order to help the private sector remain as insulated as possible over the course of this pandemic, and beyond. We need to have a strong economy to ensure that our residents continue to have a livelihood, as well as hope and faith in their government. We need to continue investing in and pursuing some of the large infrastructure projects that were outlined in this Assembly's list of priorities. We need to continue advancing the Taltson hydro expansion, the Slave Geological Corridor, and the Mackenzie Valley Highway project. We also need to invest in the expansion of Internet and cellular services for all NWT communities and highways. These projects will surely provide significant economic activity for the NWT and would provide long-lasting infrastructure that will serve our territory for many years to come.

We also need to increase the level of diversification within our economy. We must expand the

knowledge economy; expand tourism across all regions of the NWT; increase the number of journeypersons and apprentices in the small communities and regional centres; and help the sectors hurting the most right now, which includes mining, oil and gas, accommodations, and the food service industry.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, we need to support small- and medium-sized businesses wherever possible. Lowering the small business tax was a step in the right direction in this regard. Another helpful step we could take is to extend all deferred payments for BDIC loans by at least six months or more, as well as rolling back the compound interest on the principal. More than ever before, we need to be more creative and open-minded to new business ideas to ensure our economy will recover and be profitable once again.

Mr. Speaker, another way we could help small and medium-sized businesses is in the reduction of red tape and the elimination of excessive regulation within the economy. This includes refining procurement policies like the Business Incentive Policy, the Northern Manufactured Products Policy, and the government's approach to public-private partnerships. Strengthening these areas of our economy will help spur economic growth and help to retain more of the wealth that is generated here in the NWT. We must also support and promote local competition by increasing the level of awareness of NWT contracting opportunities and actively encouraging NWT businesses to apply for BIP status.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, our government must continue to collaborate with Indigenous governments in the development and implementation of regional mineral strategies and in turn work to increase resource exploration and development as well as increase funding for mining incentive programs. I fully support increased resource exploration and development as these areas are our biggest economic drivers.

Our government also needs to focus on settling and implementing land, resource, and self-government agreements with Indigenous governments. We must settle all major outstanding and ongoing land claim negotiations. Some negotiations have been going on for decades, so let's quit dragging our feet and finding excuses not to settle these outstanding claims. After some of these outstanding claims are settled, the NWT is sure to become a much more attractive and stable location to do business and gain investments.

As a result of the damages inflicted by COVID-19, we as a government must initiate our economic recovery. We must keep moving forward and work to rebuild our stagnant economy. We must be

innovative and compassionate. We must be willing to think outside the box from how things have normally been done. We cannot only operate on policies driven by bureaucracy, and we cannot lose sight of the people we are here to serve. As I said before, we must also have open minds, open hearts, and be open for change.

I want to make something clear. For the most part, I am very largely happy with how the government has handled the health response of this crisis. Our Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Kandola, took strong measures, closing our borders and restricting all travel in and out of the territory. We acted fast, and it has paid off well. Now, we just need to begin focusing on the post-pandemic economic path that we want to pave for ourselves. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Oral Questions

QUESTION 530-19(2):  
SACHS HARBOUR

**MR. JACOBSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On my Member's statement today is Sachs Harbour airport and the community wanting to work with our government. They handled the past work over the years since the airport has been in operation. Now, to work on the drainage problem that they do have and upcoming work this coming year, is the Minister willing to work with the Hamlet of Sachs Harbour to have a contract worked out with them? Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. DIANE ARCHIE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, yes. The department has had preliminary discussions with the community. They have expressed interest in the work under a negotiated contract, provided we get a support approval from their council to consider some of the work. Mr. Speaker, what we are waiting for is a support letter from the MLA from Nunakput to be able to provide to the hamlet so we can get this work going. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. JACOBSON:** Wow, I am almost in tears. I am so happy for Sachs Harbour. I want to thank the Minister in regard to that. I do have a letter coming forward for the hamlet, and it was sent in the mail. I am going to get a hold of Vince right after, when I am done here, right now. You answered everything right there. I am so happy. What is the total value of

that contract, the contract for the Hamlet of Sachs Harbour?

**HON. DIANE ARCHIE:** The work is expected to cost about \$400,000, and it would be done on a time-and-material basis. Once we get things going, that is what we are estimating. Hopefully, we can get into the community to start some of this work because it is much needed in the community.

**MR. JACOBSON:** This is my final question now. I just want to thank the Minister and the department for that. It's going to help the community of Sachs Harbour, with those extra funds to operate, O and M for the community. Thank you so much, and I look forward to working with her department.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Nunakput. I will take that as a comment. Sure. I will let the Minister have an opportunity.

**HON. DIANE ARCHIE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to respond back to the comment. Just to give the Member an idea of where we are at, we have prepared a decision paper that is ready to go to Cabinet early March, subject to the receipt of the MLA's support, of course. With that support, we will recommend a negotiated contract. Pending approval to go into a negotiated contract, we expect a contract to be in place prior to the end of March. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Good Minister. Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Hay River South.

QUESTION 531-19(2):  
SHORTAGE IN TRADES

**MR. ROCKY SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The questions I have are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Has the Minister's department assessed where the NWT is heading in terms of training and retaining trades people? I ask this as we are in dire need of trades people in the NWT. Over the past week, I really noticed it. A lot of the trades people are aging out, and we have got to replace them at some point, so I am just wondering what the department is doing to address it in the long term. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member is obviously correct. He knows what he is talking about. There is a lack of trades persons in the Northwest Territories. Across Canada, in fact, that is the situation, and the

situation is not getting any better. The department, recognizing this, did create the Apprenticeship, Trades and Occupational Certification Strategy and implemented that in 2017. We are now looking at how things have gone so far, looking at the subsidies that we are providing, going back and talking to industry and saying, "How else can we change this program? It ran for a few years; where are the successes? What can we improve on?" We are beginning that work. From there, hopefully, we can make changes and get more people involved. That is one of the things that we are doing, so we are re-evaluating all of that.

As I spoke about in this House previously, we are also looking at ways to get more women into trades, and recently the ATOC board, the Apprenticeship, Trades and Occupational Certification Strategy board, got together and discussed how can they do that. There are representatives on there from industry and other organizations, so that work is being done.

We are looking at every avenue. There are now discussions with the North Slave Correctional Centre. They are in the process of hiring an instructor, and ECE has reached out to that instructor to explain what we can provide in terms of support for inmates who want to get into trades. We are looking at every avenue because we recognize this is an issue that needs addressing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. ROCKY SIMPSON:** Has the department evaluated where additional support can be provided? I'm talking about financial support for those going into the trades or looking at the trades and to the employers who employ apprentices. The other thing is: are we looking at possibly training in communities, as well, and sharing of apprentices between companies if there is not enough work for them? Housing, for instance, might have some work for a couple of months, but they may be able to go into a private sector company for a couple of months, as well. We have to be looking at some real options here and finding ways to retain these tradespeople and apprentices before they leave the North.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** We are looking at all of that. There is federal money that comes in through labour market agreements, millions of dollars that flows to these efforts. I know that my colleague from housing has been big on trying to include training and apprenticing in housing contracts. Aurora College, through its expansion to a polytechnic university, plans on expanding its reach in communities and hopefully enticing and supporting more people into the trades in their communities because often that's where the need is. In larger centres, even though it's a challenge in Yellowknife or Hay River to get a tradesperson, it's

virtually impossible in some of the smaller communities. Yes, we are looking into all of that.

**MR. ROCKY SIMPSON:** Has the department considered or is it working with ITI to provide resources to business owners who employ trade workers and apprentices? I think it's important, when we look at businesses out there, the business may not have work all year long. There may be a little bit of a lapse. They may need some financial support or some type of support. I'd ask the Minister: have they looked at that area, as well?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** As I mentioned, there is money available to companies to hire tradespeople and people who they want to train and hopefully get into the trades. In addition to that, ECE is working more closely with ITI now, and they are strengthening that partnership. They are together creating a working group that is looking at the existing employment opportunities in the territory and how we can better work together. We're in the early stages of that work, as well. I think that, in the coming years, we are going to see a lot of changes to the program, and hopefully, that is going to entice more people to get into the trades and support more businesses as they support apprentices.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Hay River South.

**MR. ROCKY SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One area that I see that we could address is that, in the communities, we have a lot of people who are experienced in a number of areas. We have people who can build, who have carpentry experience, who have plumbing experience, who have a little bit of electrical, but they may not have the education to get into the trades. I think it's important that we also look at developing something so that we can find out who these people are and try and provide some type of certification for them, as well. In a small community where you have nobody and you have to fly someone in, it's expensive. If it's cold weather, and it's a freeze-up or whatever, people need somebody right away. Is that something the department is willing to look at, as well? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** There are a lot of people in the communities who have been doing all of the work in the communities for years, so they know a bit of everything, but perhaps they can't get into the trades. Despite the fact that they might be able to do the work, you still have to fly someone in to do the work because you need a journeyman, and that increases costs. It increases costs for whoever's doing the work, including the Government of the Northwest Territories.

We are looking at some creative solutions to assist those individuals. Again, I know I always point to the college, but expansion of the use of the community learning centres and making them more accessible and offering those types of programs, I think, would really go a long way to achieving that goal. I know there is a lot of interest in this, and there are some very interesting things happening that are on the horizon. I would be happy to sit down with committee and provide an in-depth briefing and answer and have the experts there who could answer all of the questions about what the plans are going forward, and we can get that input from committee, as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 532-19(2):  
ENVIRONMENTAL REMEDIATION AND  
ECONOMIC RECOVERY

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Premier who is responsible for federal relations. In my statement in May, October, and earlier today, I noted the potential for literally billions of dollars of federal investment across the northern territories as part of an accelerated program on contaminated sites remediation and economic recovery. It's not clear that my call for action was taken seriously in May and October. Can the Premier provide an update on the status of the work to secure accelerated federal investment to build a remediation economy? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to defer that to the Minister of ITI. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Premier. Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have had the opportunity to speak to this before in the House, and I am happy to give a bit more of an update as to the work that is under way. Mr. Speaker, the Department of ITI had previously written, when this initiative first came out, directed at three of the prairie provinces specifically and intended quite specifically to be in response to the downturn in their oil and gas economy. We saw this as an opportunity to accelerate our remediation economy. We have written to them, as I detailed here before. There was no reply to my October 4<sup>th</sup> letter, so I wrote again in December. There was no reply to that letter.

With the concern that this is about the mineral resources sector alone, I want to assure the House and assure the Member that that is not the case. It is an opportunity for the Northwest Territories, Indigenous, and other businesses for immediate economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as laying a foundation for long-term economic growth, and I go on in the letter to speak about remediation and the remediation economy. When I didn't get an answer to that, Mr. Speaker, I made arrangements to have a call with Minister O'Regan. Since that time, I have also had an opportunity to speak with my colleague in the Yukon, and the deputy ministers and the officials are also having conversations.

I share some frustration with the Member that this hasn't moved faster, but I do believe that we are at a point now where we are getting some positive traction, and I am hopeful that we will continue to be able to report positive updates to the house. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I want to thank the Minister for that very detailed update. That's great. I would love to see those letters. Clearly, the approach that we have taken to date has been a dismal failure. From what I've seen, we continue to pitch this investment as a way to bail out the petroleum and mineral industry. Federal support is not a way to back track on polluter-pays and liabilities for the private sector. What assurance can the Minister give me that we are going to change our bailout approach and start to make a pitch for an accelerated northern contaminated sites remediation program?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** I have provided my two previous letters to the Member. I will certainly be happy to provide my December letter to the Member, as well. Let me continue to, just for the sake of the House, reassure everyone that, indeed, this is not about bailouts and this is about a future remediation economy.

Not only are there projects ready to move forward in the short term, remediation work is poised to be a significant source of economic growth in the medium- and long-term across the Northwest Territories. There is significant interest in becoming involved in this work early in order to build capacity for future participation in this potential growth sector.

Mr. Speaker, I should also note that I had reached out to Indigenous communities, Indigenous governments, in advance of sending this December letter seeking their support so that they, too, would have an opportunity to voice to the federal government what they had voiced to me, which was their own interest in this area. I did receive one letter of support that went in at the same time, in addition to, as I've said, receiving many verbal

indications of an interest in this area, as an economic opportunity and not as any form of bailout or otherwise. It's an area of potential growth, and we have characterized it as such.

**MR. O'REILLY:** I want to thank the Minister for that. Now she's starting to talk my talk. This is great. Look, I'm not afraid to roll up my sleeves and get dirty, too. I think part of the problem here is that we don't have a concrete proposal that has been put together to show what the contaminated sites are, the risk they pose, the cost to assess and remediate them, the benefits that will accrue. As I said, I am more than happy to roll up my sleeves and help with the work. Can the Minister tell us whether there is a concrete proposal for an accelerated northern contaminated sites remediation program?

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** I'd like to defer that to the Minister of ENR.

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

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Preventing environmental liability and effective management of contaminant sites and the stimulus of local economy opportunities through remediation are high priorities for this government. Meeting a remediation economy will require a balanced approach between ensuring we continue to prioritize projects based on the degree of risk to people, property, and the environment, and also consider economic opportunities that a project may offer. The GNWT is currently working to explore new ways in which the GNWT can support a remediation economy in the Northwest Territories. Remediation projects create economic opportunities through employment, training, and procurement. The GNWT developed a document called "The GNWT Approach to Contaminant Management" in 2019. This document provides guidance to the GNWT departments on how to manage sites that the GNWT is working on. Lands and ENR are also working to finalize a negotiated mandate for excepted waste sites under the devolution agreement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Premier and the Minister. It's great to see that there's a whole-of-government approach here that is starting to emerge, but I'm not sure that I really got a good answer there. Look, I'm ready to roll up my sleeves and get dirty and help with this work. We have these inventories that are there. We just have to put together a solid ask. The document that the Minister talked about that was prepared in the last Assembly was not very good,

and I'll leave it at that. This work could be a key part of what the polytechnic university is going to be doing, to help build capacity and capture the opportunities for a remediation economy. Will the Premier commit to regularly updating MLAs on her efforts moving forward to accelerate remediation work? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE:** Yes, we will commit to regularly updating Regular Members through the appropriate standing committees on the work regarding remediation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Honourable Premier. Oral questions. Member for Great Slave.

QUESTION 533-19(2):  
WOMEN DRIVING THE ECONOMY

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Human Resources as well as the Minister responsible for the Status of Women. What is the breakdown of affirmative action recruitment, specifically for P1s and women, from January 2020 to January 2021? Thank you.

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

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes, for specific numbers, I am very grateful for a bit of a sense of where this is going. I am able to say that, with respect to the period of January 2020 to January 2021, female hires, 67.9 percent, and Indigenous affirmative action candidates, 239 or 24.6 percent. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. NOKLEBY:** I am going to follow up with the Minister after if that's Indigenous Aboriginal or Indigenous non-Aboriginal, but I will follow up later. Can the Minister tell me what she and her department are doing to ensure that any recruits under the affirmative action policy are set up for success in their new positions? How does the GNWT ensure the retainment of these priority hires?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** The House may recall me saying a lot of this when there was a theme day on human resources, and human resources supports all the other departments. They are the client departments, so this has to be a whole-of-government approach, and I'm glad I know that other departments pay attention to the exchanges in the House. I can speak to what the Human Resources Department does and what it offers. Specifically, there is an onboarding process for all staff. There is a 90-day program that has a variety of different orientations to support the basics of how to get oriented to being a government

employee, but also a variety of other online educational opportunities. There are education and career advancement opportunities, there is career advancement within, training programs within the GNWT, as well as opportunities to apply to take courses and education outside of the GNWT. Indeed, there can be training plans that can be requested and people can have an opportunity to seek training plans to put themselves on a certain career pathway. Again, that does take all of government, so I am, again, pleased to have the opportunity to speak to it because it does mean that each department has to have responsibility to seek out those opportunities for their individual staff.

**MS. NOKLEBY:** I do appreciate that some of this is repetitive, but I'm always going to continue to ask these types of questions. Can the Minister give us an update on the work that is being done to implement the new gender-based analysis or lens that is being applied across all of the government departments? What is the current state for Northwest Territories women when it comes to equal pay and promotion within the GNWT?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Let me try to catch the last one first. With respect to equal pay and promotion, the GNWT is a workplace that values and places an expectation that there is equal pay for work of equal value. Gender does not form part of the considerations that go into determining job descriptions or salaries. Indeed, the salary grid is quite specific and carefully delineated and does not include gender, so that gender should not be a factor that impacts on equal pay for work of equal value.

As for gender-based analysis plus, I am very pleased that this program exists now in the Northwest Territories or in the Government of the Northwest Territories. It is part of the considerations for all decisions that are being made with a financial lens by the Financial Management Board, but it is only as good as the information that goes in. We are reliant on the information that goes into that process. I can say the Department of Finance's staff have taken the gender-based analysis training. We are now looking to ensure that the policy staff and financial policy staff at all the other departments also have that training, so that we get the best possible information so that we can actually apply that lens in an even better fashion.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really glad to hear that and would encourage the Minister to just have that become something for all GNWT employees, but I do recognize that can cost a lot of money. For my last question, I can't just always focus on women, so I would like to know: what is

the GNWT doing to ensure that men have equal access to employment in both the public and private sector in professions that are typically considered to be non-traditional for them? Thank you.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** With respect to the GNWT's staffing, men are not a designated group of priority within the affirmative action policy, and so, as such, they wouldn't get an enhanced or any sort of additional focus in that regard. Certainly, there is a merit-based system overall to staffing, and that should be applied in a way that is fair and equitable, again, across the board, regardless of gender. However, there is nothing specific for men, and I acknowledge that, indeed, in the Northwest Territories and with the COVID pandemic, it, indeed, was a lot of the male traditional areas that saw a lot of the job decline. Perhaps some further attention does need to get paid to that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 534-19(2):  
TOURISM

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Masi, Mr. Speaker. [Translation] Today, about the all-season road to Whati. How is the government getting along? I have questions for the Minister of ITI. [End of translation] [Microphone turned off] ...celebration in November, the grand opening of the all-weather road. I would just like to know from the department of tourism the preparation for that road. The first question I have for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment is: what can the Minister tell this Assembly about the danger of embracing community-based tourism without adequate planning and preparation by the government and by community members and also community entrepreneurs? Masi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Monfwi. Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Mr. Speaker, I think I already got the "you talk too long" look, Mr. Speaker, so I'm a little bit hesitant to go in on too much length here. When I heard the Member's statement earlier about the road to Whati, about the fact that there is going to be tourism opportunities, I immediately called up a document that I have which, essentially, was lessons learned from the Tuktoyaktuk highway expansion.

The Department of ITI has already connected the community government in Whati to the community government in Tuktoyaktuk to do some of the lessons learned to figure out what worked and what could be done better. There are a number of important areas here. I think, certainly, I need to

follow up with the Member and ensure that work is being done to follow-up with the community directly because everything from ensuring the right infrastructure is available in the community to ensuring that business, small businesses, are feeling robust and able and prepared and ensuring that also tourism businesses, specifically, have the right infrastructure and have the right kind of product available. Some of that work is under way, but again, I'm certainly going to ensure that we are getting ready and ramping up and knowing that that date is soon coming. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. LAFFERTY:** It is great that the Minister is following up on pros and cons of the Tuktoyaktuk Highway, the best practices, so we don't encounter similar challenges on the all-weather road. The next question I have: if this new all-weather road sparks community-based tourism in Whati, that tourism will belong to the people of Whati, not the territorial government. How is the Minister engaging with Whati to ensure that Whati is in the driver's seat and that tourism is respectful of Whati's value, tradition, and also their interests?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** I couldn't agree more. This is not a GNWT-led initiative at all. This is Whati government led, Tlicho government led. The role of the Department of ITI is there to support and to provide whatever assistance is requested or sought after. Certainly, this is not a project that we should be leading. I can say that there is an application that was received by the Department of ITI from the Tlicho government to help support the development of a one-year tourism, hospitality, small business start-up program. I am very happy to provide that support financially, as well as in terms of educational component so that, indeed, that can be driven by the community and developed in a way that is appropriate and respectful of the values of the community.

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Thanks again to the Minister for providing the latest update in engaging the community on the proposal as has been submitted. There is just one proposal. I am sure there will be others. I want to refer to parks along the road from Highway 3, all the way to Whati, and in the community of Whati, as well. What consideration has the Minister's department given to a devolvement of new parks within the Whati region in response to tourism opportunities that will arrive with a new all-season road? How has the department engaged with Whati under the devolvement of new parks in the region?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** There's not currently anything in the infrastructure plans of the department with respect to territorial parks. I'm not sure if, indeed, there may be a community driven plan or a Tlicho government driven plan for a park, in which case would certainly again, same as

before, happy to provide a supporting role. Again, I'm a bit hesitant to say anything more beyond that other than that there's nothing at this point, but certainly would be happy to work with the community if there is a role for the GNWT therein.

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

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Masi, Mr. Speaker. The reason that I'm raising this issue now, we have to start planning, like today, before November opening of the celebration of the all-season road. I will be following up with the department again and with my leadership, as well. Mr. Speaker, my next question is the monitoring mechanism. As you know, there will be an influx of people from all walks of life going through the community of Whati. I would like to ask the Minister: the real work starts when the all-season road is completed. Monitors will be needed to engage impacts. Additional police will be required to patrol the road. Staff will be needed to issue fishing licences, and also park permits. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister explain how the department's preparing for those challenges? Masi, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** I understand there is an ongoing, I believe, working group. If it's not that formal, then perhaps that's the next step as to formalize that group, working between ITI, the Government of the Northwest Territories, as well as the community of Whati and the Tlicho government to ensure that whatever needs their government may have that if they are inviting our participation in support, that we are there to provide it. What I would suggest at this point, Mr. Speaker, is to indeed confirm what the state of the working group is if it is that formal and, if it's not, to move it along there so that we can indeed identify correctly where the GNWT's role is and what needs to be in place. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 535-19(2):  
AURORA COLLEGE

**MS. SEMMLER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of ECE. I recognize work is under way to transform Aurora College into a polytechnic institute, and that earth, resources, and environment management is identified as an area of specialization. Mr. Speaker, I would like to know what, exactly, will be the focus for the Western Arctic Aurora College campus and what is the role of the Aurora Research Institute in the polytechnic transformation? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Aurora Research Institute is the research division of Aurora College. They have staff across the territory, and they have a very robust presence in Inuvik. The Inuvik campus includes the Western Arctic Research Centre, which houses multiple teams working on things like remote sensing, climate change, northern energy needs. As the college transforms into a polytechnic, that research element will require a larger and larger role. One of the big differences between universities and colleges is that research element. I think that we might be entering the golden age for research in the Western Arctic. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. SEMMLER:** We have had a lot of discussions, and this government and in the past government in regards to climate change, and I would like to know, will the Western Arctic take the leadership role for climate change of research in the Northwest Territories and focus it in Inuvik?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** That's the plan. Increasing the supports for research is part of what we're doing as we transform to a polytechnic university. In October, we released the initial areas of specialization, and as the Member stated that included earth, resources, and environment management as one of the areas. Climate change fits in that perfectly. I was pleased to hear that the college is in the process of hiring a research chair in climate change which will be located in Inuvik. I am also happy to report that Education, Culture and Employment is hiring a climate change archeologist to be centred in Inuvik. Those are some of the things that we are doing, so we are making steps. It's not something that I can say, "We're going to do this in the future." We're doing this now.

**MS. SEMMLER:** Will the Minister answer: how will the polytechnic work with the private sector to deliver programs in the Western Arctic that lead to employment or business opportunities in the regions?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Engaging with the private sector is critical to a polytechnic university. Polytechnics are based on hands-on learning, and we need the private sector to assist with that. I know there's always a strong desire for apprentice programs in the Beaufort-Delta, and in order to do that, we need partners to work with. There are constant discussions with current staff and both the Gwich'in and the IRC about their needs and how we can partner together. Yes, there has been a very close connection with private enterprise. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

QUESTION 536-19(2):  
COMPENSATION FOR HUNTERS AND  
TRAPPERS

**MR. NORN:** Marsi cho, Mr. Speaker. In line with my Member's statement, I have some questions for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. Continuing on with my line of questions from last week, last week, the Minister advised that affected hunters and trappers are eligible for funding in case of environmental damages such as the environmental event that happened. In reviewing last week's notes, I did not see any exact numbers. Can the Minister give an update on what exactly these amounts are? Marsi cho.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the scope of impact, ENR is currently looking at all available options to support impacted trappers. Because of the extent of damage, this year only, the maximum available to the harvester disaster compensation program has been extended to up to \$40,000 per site impacted, subject to criteria. ENR will work with trappers quickly to complete and process their claim. The scope of the damage may not be known until after the spring. We recognize the value that hunting and trapping provides the traditional economy in the Northwest Territories and the important cultural significance of the activities in this area. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. NORN:** I'm a little bit disappointed to hear that number. I looked at a few of the photos, and, for example, I saw a few outboard motors sitting there that were water damaged. Giving an example, one 60 horsepower motor is in excess of \$5,000. If it's \$4,000 per site, that doesn't really do much to replace some of the equipment that is damaged for some of the trappers and hunters there. I am hoping that we could revisit this and work with the Minister to try to do a little bit more to help. In my next line of questioning, I do note that hunters and trappers from other areas of the NWT who have access were granted compensation for lost revenue and damaged equipment. Can the Minister provide more details from, let's say, for example, the last five years for where and who accessed these funding pots in the past?

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Due to privacy, I can't provide specific details on who has accessed the program before, but I am more than willing to meet with the Member to have those conversations later on.

**MR. NORN:** Thank you for the response. Since there's privacy there, I suppose there are some ATIP options, but at least, if we could get some numbers by region, that might help a little better to protect privacy. My next question is: can the Minister commit to having his department visit the areas affected, immediately, preferably, to provide an assessment on damaged and lost equipment in the area?

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** ENR took immediate action upon becoming aware of the flooding. Staff flew over the Taltson River system from the dam to the Great Slave Lake river outlet to assess the extent of the flooding and the impact of the cabin and property. Staff also travelled to Fort Resolution to speak with local trappers and cabin owners to collect information on the scope and impact of the flooding on their traplines, cabin, and equipment. ENR officers visited impacted sites along with local residents to obtain firsthand insight into the impact. Because of the spring melt, we may not know the full scope of the damage until this spring.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary. Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

**MR. NORN:** Marsi cho, Mr. Speaker. It's really comforting to hear that his department is working with my constituents. I think it's always good to work together. That leads to my last question. We talked a little bit about environmental assessments. I believe that traditional knowledge is really important. You can take a sample size and do an environmental assessment, but you're never going to quite always get that. I think that oral knowledge, local knowledge, is so valuable. There is knowledge you can't get from Googling something or taking a topography report or a hydrology report. It's always good to work with our elders. My last question is: will the Minister consider any traditional input from our elders or have local elders work with scientists in any upcoming environmental assessments? Marsi cho, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Traditional knowledge is considered in the environmental assessment process. ENR has been and will continue to work with local and traditional knowledge holders related to the impact on the high water levels of the Taltson. Mr. Speaker, I must really stress to the Members in this House that ENR is about local and traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge. We build our answers, our information, collectively in all three parts. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 537-19(2):  
LAND LEASES

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spoke earlier about the importance of developing an agricultural industry in the Northwest Territories to make sure that our residents have food security. My question for the Minister of Lands is: is the department willing to develop agricultural leases? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The department currently issues commercial leases for agricultural purposes. The department is currently working on agriculture-specific leases, evaluation criteria, and direct to support the issue of leases for agriculture purposes. We are also reviewing the type of leases that we issue as part of the work of implementing the Public Lands Act. It's part of our phase 1 step. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. JOHNSON:** I am glad to hear that that work is going. I believe phase 1 wraps up somewhere in 2023, so I will look forward to asking these questions in the next Assembly as well. Is part of that work to amend the commercial leases or the development of a new agricultural lease which would allow people to live on their farms? Presently, right now, if you get a commercial lease, you are not allowed to live there, and I know that many people have expressed the desire to actually live on their farms.

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** First of all, I would just like to comment on his comment. It will be done before this Assembly is done. It will be done, just so he knows. I have to make sure he understands because we don't know if we are going to be here in the 20<sup>th</sup> Assembly.

In regards to his question, the department currently does not issue residential leases outside of community boundaries. However, the department has provided leases for agricultural use on Commissioner's land to allow for a resident or homesteader on a split parcel. Mixed use leases will be considered as part of the work we are doing to the implement the Public Lands Act. These questions that he hammers us with on the floor here, I greatly appreciate it because these are some of the things that we are trying to fix with these regulations.

**MR. JOHNSON:** I believe there was a commitment that this work was going to be done in the life of this Assembly. I am very happy to hear that. The issue right now is that we don't issue residential leases outside of municipal boundaries. You can only get a residential lease beside a commercial lease within the municipal boundaries, which is not where most of the farmland is. I think even larger to this issue is

that much of our land is tied up in withdrawals or disputes, and it's very unclear. A lot of the history of what land is potentially farmable in the NWT has been lost.

My question is: has the Department of Lands done any surveying or identifying of potential arable land in the Northwest Territories? I know that many jurisdictions have vast agricultural land protections in place to make sure that that land is identified and prioritized for farming. Has the department identified potential farmland in the Northwest Territories?

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** I made that commitment a long time ago that we will have this. It's not a new commitment; it's something that we are actually doing to achieve in this Assembly. I thank the department and the staff for doing the hard work that they are doing. The department works closely with the Department of ITI who promotes and supports the agricultural sector of the economy. We continue to issue leases for agriculture in all areas of the NWT, except where there are restrictions related to issuing land tender, such as land withdrawal areas. If a resident is interested in obtaining an agriculture lease, they can contact the regional offices to discuss areas that may be available, and staff are available to assist them with the process.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That did not quite answer my question. What I am looking for is for the department to go out and do some sort of inventorying of the land that is arable in the Northwest Territories and has the potential for farming. If that land ends up in the hands of an Indigenous government, great; that is great news, and I am happy. Maybe we could settle some claims. However, I think actually tracking the land and making sure we know which land is arable and has potential for farming is a key step in this, so is the department willing to go out and inventory how much agricultural land we have? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** No, we are not going to. We right now have unauthorized occupancy and public lands regulations we have to get done. We have got a number of things that we need to do. However, if somebody is interested in getting an agriculture piece of land, if they want to do a farm, they can reach out to the regional offices to see what is available. What they also have to understand is that each lease has to go through consultation, section 35, so we need to do it right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 538-19(2):  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HOUSING  
CORPORATION SAFE AND SECURE HOUSING

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hope to be out of here really, really quickly because these are four easy yeses. My questions today are for the Minister of the Housing Corporation, sir. My first question is: the mission statement of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation identifies six goals, all of which are associated with acquiring, building, and maintaining infrastructure; it does not identify the Housing Corporation's responsibility to provide safe and secure housing by addressing the personal needs of its clients. Will the Minister commit to redrafting the Housing Corporation's mission statement to reflect its responsibility to provide housing as a social service rather than solely as a commodity? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. Minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

**HON. PAULIE CHINNA:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Thank you.

**MS. CLEVELAND:** One of four. The legislation of the NWT Housing Corporation speaks to the financial and lending capabilities of the corporation but not to the expectation to provide access to integrated social support. Will the Minister commit to modernizing the legislation of the NWT Housing Corporation to provide access to the full range of financial and social supports to help all NWT residents access safe and secure housing?

**HON. PAULIE CHINNA:** I will bring this back to my department for further discussion, and I will follow up with the Member.

**MS. CLEVELAND:** I will be half happy with that one. Will the Minister make a commitment to develop wraparound service standards to be used by all LHOs and LHAs?

**HON. PAULIE CHINNA:** Right now, the Housing Corporation is engaging with our LHOs and LHAs throughout the Northwest Territories. I will have to follow up with the Member as we will be doing those reviews, and I will keep her updated.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My last question for the Minister is a very important one. I am wondering if the Minister will commit the LHOs and LHAs to stop evicting

Northerners from public housing without first connecting people to social supports needed for housing success. Thank you.

**HON. PAULIE CHINNA:** I know that evictions are quite sensitive throughout the Northwest Territories, but what I have encountered while I have had the portfolio as the housing Minister is that there are a variety of situations that occur throughout the Northwest Territories. Safety is number one for the Housing Corporation and also working with our tenants. I will keep the Member informed, but this is an issue that we have been dealing with within the corporation, but it's a very sensitive issue. Like I said, the safety is a huge concern. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 539-19(2):  
COMPENSATION FOR HARVESTERS

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Traditional economy is extremely important to all residents affected by the flooding. As a former chief, more clarity must be given to the harvesters affected. Would the Minister of ENR consider compensating the harvesters with proper assessment in dollars of their losses? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have a program. I did provide that information here on the floor, to the Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. We do have a process, and we work with the trappers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Could the Minister of ENR be more realistic, with a proper compensation package for the harvesters affected?

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** We are being realistic. We have looked at it. We have actually looked at how we can actually see the funds. We have actually increased it, but it's only this year that we are dealing with it. Yes, we are being realistic on it. Are we going to be able to provide them the whole cost? No. That is unrealistic in this time of need.

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Thinking outside of the box of policy for harvesters is vital. Would the Minister start thinking outside the box?

**HON. SHANE THOMPSON:** That is an interesting question, thinking outside the box. We do think outside the box all the time. That is what ENR is about. It's working with our Indigenous people, our co-management, and it's about using local and traditional knowledge as we deal with it, so

sometimes we do what we can do outside of what our policies are to help the people of the Northwest Territories.

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

QUESTION 540-19(2):  
RED TAPE

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is part of our mandate to establish a working group which will ultimately look at all of our regulations in an effort to cut the regulatory burden and red tape on small businesses. My question for the Minister of ITI is: has that working group been established? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As it is, I am standing as the Minister of Finance. This is actually a finance-led initiative, and it is one of the items that we are responsible for under the mandate. Indeed, yes, there has now been a red-tape working group established, including both GNWT representatives as well as people from the private sector. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. JOHNSON:** Can I have the Minister of Finance speak to some of the areas that this working group is going to review? My concern is that the term "red tape" and the amount of regulations that the GNWT has, it runs for miles. There are potentially many rabbit holes to go down and many areas to look at. Have some parameters been set for what this working group is actually going to look at?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** It is specifically focusing on red tape that impacts the functioning of small business and small- and medium-sized businesses, and it's done within a context of understanding that, of course, some regulations are necessary, whether for public health and safety or for environmental protection, for example. What the initial order of business is for the working group is indeed to establish some parameters of where they are going to focus on and how they are going to be able to move the needle. Even the common words of "red tape" I rather shy away from, but really the idea is: what do we have as regulations; what regulations are required; why are they required; which ones can be facilitated to move forward and be a little more streamlined. It really is within that spirit of finding that balance and trying to improve the functioning and process for the benefit of the small-business community but also for the better functioning of government.

**MR. JOHNSON:** The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, for years, had a report card on red tape, and every year, the Northwest Territories got an "F," and then eventually, they just took the territories off of the report card, presumably because we were doing so badly at it. One of the first steps that they recommended in measuring red tape is: is the government actually doing an assessment of how much regulation it has? I have seen some of our regulations that were copied and pasted from the federal government decades ago, and I don't think that they ever have been looked at since. Is part of this work to reduce red tape going to be an evaluation of our regulations? Perhaps we could even start by just knowing how much regulation we actually have on the books?

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** As it turned out, I believe the organization the Member was speaking of had a red tape reduction week only just recently in January. I had the opportunity to have some correspondence from them, and I am actually hopeful that we do get back on the report card. I don't mind getting a bad grade if it means that we can improve our grades going forward. I am hopeful that this initiative is one step towards that.

As we are doing the broad scan, again, Mr. Speaker, right now, what we are proposing to do is two-fold. It's to really figure out what regulations we have and whether we need them. Step one, indeed, is going to be that there is an inventory done. It is being done by the working group and within the context, again, of small- and medium-sized business as the focus. It's not necessarily an entire government-wide initiative as of yet. We want to make sure we are biting off something that we can chew and be successful with. The initial focus is on regulatory improvements for the small- and medium-sized business sector, but indeed, looking to gather that inventory.

Mr. Speaker, it certainly is my hope that this is not intended to be exclusive to this working group. This is going to be an opportunity to seek out contributions from across the Northwest Territories, from across sectors, from across business communities, business organizations, environmental communities, environmental organizations. This is really an opportunity to look at what we are doing and try to find a way to be more streamlined and do it better.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe sometimes the wording of "red tape" can be a bit confusing. To me, it's actually more of an issue of user-friendliness or user experience for someone approaching the government. I spoke earlier about

agriculture, and, for example, if you wanted to start a farm in municipal boundaries, you would have to go to the town first. Then you would have to go to the GNWT for approval, and then you would have to get lost in the world of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The idea that there could be one simple agriculture form is impossible. My question is: I recognize those other areas of government are not the mandate of the Minister of Finance, but is part of this red tape working group going to be to look at possible ways of working better with the other levels of government? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** As it is, the red tape reduction working group membership is chaired by the Department of Finance. However, it also includes departmental representation from the Department of Infrastructure as well as a regional superintendent from the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment. It was actually at the suggestion of committee that we ensure that those representatives were not only from Yellowknife, but were regional, so there is representation from across different regions. Indeed, the functioning of the government needs to be streamlined and needs to be one that is responsive to the needs of different communities and is aware of some of the challenges that small- and medium-sized businesses might be facing in different communities, as that might be different in different areas.

Mr. Speaker, I feel like the Member had a couple of questions for me there. I was worried I wouldn't run down the time. That's no longer my challenge. My concern now is ensuring that I have actually answered his question. Let me conclude, Mr. Speaker, with one comment, which is: again, not only does it need to be multi-sectoral or multi-departmental, which, again, I believe it is, but really looking at the functioning, as well, again, using one-window services, using reporting systems that are singular rather than multiple, and really trying to ensure that we have one form for business or users rather than multiples. Those are exactly the kinds of issues that are on the agenda for this working group. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Our time for oral questions has expired. Item 9, written questions. Item 10, returns to written questions. Item 11, replies to Commissioner's address. Item 12, petitions. Item 13, reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 14, reports of standing and special committees. Item 15, tabling of documents. Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

### Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 304-19(2):  
DIGITAL PHOTOS OF TALTSOON AREA  
FLOODING FROM JANUARY 8 TO FEBRUARY 2,  
2021

**MR. NORN:** Marsi cho, Mr. Speaker. Today, I will table some digital photos of the Taltson area flooding dated January 8 to February 2, 2021. Marsi cho, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Tabling of documents. Member for Frame Lake.

TABLED DOCUMENT 305-19(2):  
DRAFT AMENDED RULES OF THE NORTHWEST  
TERRITORIES LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY,  
FEBRUARY 10, 2021

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. I wish to table the "Draft Amended Rules of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories, dated February 10, 2021." Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Tabling of documents. Item 16, notices of motion. Member for Frame Lake.

### Notices of Motion

MOTION 28-19(2):  
AMENDMENTS TO THE RULES OF THE  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES LEGISLATIVE  
ASSEMBLY

**MR. O'REILLY:** Merci, Monsieur le President. I give notice that, on Friday, February 12, 2021, I will move the following motion: now therefore I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Nahendeh, that this Legislative Assembly repeal the Rules of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly originally adopted on December 10, 2019, and adopt the newest version of the Rules of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories identified as Tabled Document 305-19(2); and further that the new Rules of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly, upon adoption of this motion, come into effect immediately. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. 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. 21, consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters: Minister's Statement 77-19(2): National Housing Co-Investment Fund; Tabled Document 165-19(2): Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee

Report 1-19(2), Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery - Recommendations to the GNWT; Tabled Document 166-19(2): Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 2-19(2), Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery - Recommendations to the GNWT; Tabled Document 167-19(2), Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 3-19(2), Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery - Recommendations to the GNWT; and Tabled Document 286-19(2), Main Estimates 2021-2022, with the Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes in the chair.

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

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

**MR. NORN:** Mahsi, Madam Chair. Committee wishes to continue on dealing with Tabled Document 286-19(2), Main Estimates 2021-2022, Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Mahsi.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, committee. We will take a short recess and resume with the first item.

---SHORT RECESS

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Welcome back, committee. We will be continuing on under the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, junior kindergarten to grade 12 school services. Sergeant-at-Arms, will you escort the witnesses back into the Chamber. Minister, will you introduce your witnesses, please?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I would like to welcome my deputy minister, Ms. Rita Mueller, and Mr. Sam Shannon, the assistant deputy minister of Corporate Services. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, and welcome back today. Are there Member who still have questions for the junior kindergarten to grade 12 on page 48? Mr. Bonnetrouge.

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** Mahsi, Madam Chair. I don't know if this is the section, but I'm inquiring about I think you called them student support, that they are classroom assistants. Is that what they are called, student supports?

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. There are a number of different positions. We have program support teachers, are the teachers who are the support teachers in the classrooms. You know what, for the different types of individuals in the education system, I will ask the deputy minister to elaborate because, in addition to that, we also have teams at ECE that assist teachers, as well. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. We do typically call those individuals who are working either one-on-one with children or in small groups "student support assistants." They used to be called "classroom assistants," but we changed that name, tried to promote changing that name a while ago. We also have, as the Minister mentioned, program support teachers. Program support teachers are not assigned a full-time teaching schedule. What they are meant to do is to help all of the other classroom teachers in the school be able to develop the appropriate plans for children who need some kind of adopted or adapted plan, and they also act as a liaison between the parents and children with complex needs and different services that could be provided for them. Every education authority also has a regional inclusive schooling coordinator who, on behalf of the education authority, works to support those program support teachers as well as all the student support assistants. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Deputy Minister. Member for Deh Cho.

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** Mahsi. It's getting kind of confusing in the schools now with so many bodies helping here and there. When I used to be a classroom assistant, I think we went through a program, a diploma program. Back then, I think it was over four summers. I'm just wondering because now I'm confused about the student support. I think, back then, we called them "specialized teachers" who did one-on-one with children who had problems. Your program support people almost sound like the classroom assistants, if you are setting work plans or schedules, helping the main teacher. I'm just wondering if there is any kind of training program for those people, if there is anything in the plans or if they have anything in place because I know, with the Aboriginal Head Start, for any employment at that place, you had to have an early childhood certificate, at least; as a start, anyway. I'll let the Minister respond to that. Mahsi.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I'd like to ask the deputy minister to answer.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. As part of the recommendations that the OAG provided to us, they recommended that we need to do more to train the adults in the school who are working as support assistants; again, formerly known as "classroom assistants." Therefore, in our business plan as well as in our response to the OAG, we have committed to developing a training program for all student support assistants and we plan on piloting that training program in the upcoming school year 2021-2022. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Deputy Minister. Member for Deh Cho.

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** You say "piloting." Is that for all schools throughout the territories? Mahsi.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, it will be available to all schools. The reason we call it "piloting," it's a term we use a lot. Whenever we are implementing any new curriculum or any new program in a school, we use the first year as an opportunity to learn and to understand what is working and not working in that program and then to make changes as needed before we say it's officially territorially implemented, but it will be available to all schools. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Deputy Minister. Member for Deh Cho.

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** No, no further questions here. Mahsi.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Are there any further questions? Member for Monfwi.

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Masi, Madam Chair. Just a couple of questions. First is the language immersion programs. I imagine it falls under either Indigenous languages and education or minority language education and instruction; I'm not sure which one it falls under. We have 49 schools across the Northwest Territories. How many of those schools are delivering, currently, the language immersion program? Masi.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The Indigenous Language immersion program, I believe there are four schools offering it at the younger grades, up until perhaps grade 4 or so, in most cases. Thank you.

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

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Masi, Madam Chair. There has been an increase in the area of revitalization and language devolvement. What are the plans? Are we really going to stick to four, or are we going to increase these immersion programs into the communities that badly need it? Especially the outlying, remote communities. Masi.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I would love to see that happen. The way education is structured in the territory, the governing system, the delivery of programming is the responsibility of the education authorities, and so it's really up to the regions and the communities as to whether or not they want to offer that. Looking at the modernization of the Education Act, this is an area where there is an opportunity maybe to be more prescriptive, if we need to be, or if that's what the public wishes, but right now, it's not up to us. However, a lot of the work that we do at ECE in terms of revitalization is supporting new language speakers, and those are needed in order to teach the courses. I know, right now, it can be difficult sometimes to find Indigenous-language speakers who can teach certain programs, and so we support their efforts in that way. Thank you.

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

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Masi, Madam Chair. I'm glad the Minister recognizes that lack of qualified language-speaking teachers, and we should be doing more in that area. We've been talking about that for a number of years, now. We're still talking about that. Yes, there is the MAP program. There are other small initiatives on the go, but this is an area that we need to focus on. Obviously, the language immersion program, four in the communities, I'd like to see more. It's not the local district education authorities that are here before us; it's the Minister and his department. They are the ones who are accountable to us, and we need to promote more of these, so I just want to get that message out to the Minister's department.

Another area, Madam Chair, is pre-trades in the schools. When you talk about the career development, I'm on page 48, there has been a lot of discussion on those individual students who have

taken on pre-trades in high school. When I was in high school, there were mechanic and welding and other trades sectors. In the schools, within the 49 schools, again similar to the first question, how many schools are delivering pre-trades in high school, which eventually amounts to four years of taking a program and almost the completion of journeyman ticket holders? I'm just curious where we're at with that. Masi.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. That is all the information I have here. Part of the reason is because, although, as the Member pointed out, I am responsible for education in the territory and I hold myself responsible, the fact is that education is very decentralized. The education authorities have a lot of authority. They hold the information, as well, and so we have to go to them to get that information. It changes often, so it's not something we have at our fingertips. There are a number of things that we are doing. The SNAP program is one of them, where the student can earn credits and earn money and work toward accreditation. We also have additional programs where you can get credits for working in other fields. Perhaps I can ask the deputy minister to expand on this, because it is quite a large area and there's always a lot of interest in it, Madam Chair. Thank you.

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

**MS. MUELLER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. As the Minister mentioned, it looks different everywhere. Even within regions, it could look different from school to school. Certainly, we know that any hands-on initiatives with children and youth are really well-received, and kids learn very well that way. Some of the more recent advances we have had in introducing senior high students to the trades is, as the Minister mentioned, through the SNAP program. I am really pleased to let you know, we have about 20 students right now this school year who are involved in the SNAP program across different communities. Really, what it does is: it allows them to earn credits towards their high school diploma, as well as get invaluable experience doing real projects in the community as led by journeymen. Often, those students have the opportunity to get paid a certain amount of money after their school hours because they often will get hired for part-time jobs, as well.

We also are looking at, with our career and education advisors that are expanding to the regions, we know that we have to have more focus on the trades and getting youth interested in trades. One of our CEAs is a tradesperson and has been

really behind the scenes of supporting those SNAP students. We are going to have one of our career and education advisors be a specialist in trades so that our students are identifying that that's something that they want to do. Regardless of where they live, they will be connected with him, and he will help facilitate connections as needed within that community and broader, with businesses at the local level, and so on. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. LAFFERTY:** Masi, Madam Chair. This particular area, obviously, we push our students to enter trades and get a journeyman ticket after three or four years; three years for welding. In the past 15, 20 years, we've been pushing for students to enter post-secondary so they can become lawyers and such professions, but now, there's even more push for trades. It is lacking in our communities. It is great to see 20 students; 20 students across the Northwest Territories, Madam Chair. We should see more of these students in these programs, in pre-trades, grade 10, grade 11, grade 12, taking these pre-trades program. Once they leave high school, they have one or two years to go. That is my wish. Madam Chair, if I can get the Minister to make a commitment to provide what we are currently delivering through district education on the pre-trades, how many students there are currently registered, and what is the plan going forward? Those are just some of the questions I have for the Minister. Masi.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Yes, we can provide that information.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Member for Monfwi. No? Are there any other questions under Education, Culture and Employment, junior kindergarten to grade 12 school services? Seeing none, please turn to page 49. Education, Culture and Employment, junior kindergarten to grade 12 school services, operations expenditure summary, 2021-2022 Main Estimates, \$195,033,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** We will now go to income security. Minister, did you wish to switch out your witnesses?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Yes, please, Madam Chair. I'd like to ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to escort the witness in, and then our deputy minister will step out for this section.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, can you please assist the witnesses. Minister, will you please introduce your witness?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I hope the camera saw the Sergeant-at-Arms diligently cleaning the area and disinfecting it for our new witness, to show that we are following the COVID protocols. I would like to introduce Mr. Mike Saturnino. He is the assistant deputy minister of Labour. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Welcome. Members, we are going to start income security, beginning on page 44, with information items on page 47. Questions? Member for Yellowknife North.

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at student financial assistance, and I was hoping I could just get some explanation as to, on page 45, the changes in budget. I see we've revised the main estimates, the \$17 million, and then we once again are keeping that increased number at \$17,059,000. Is that due to a change in the SFA program, an increase in money, or is that due to an increase in students? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. That's due to the increased support for students in response to COVID-19. We had supports this year, and they are rolling over into next year, as well. There's also an increase in student loan fund valuation allowance. If anyone would like to know what that is, I can get the assistant deputy minister of Corporate Services to answer. Thank you.

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

**MR. SHANNON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. The student loan fund valuation allowance is the appropriation that we would use to cover any remissions, loan forgiveness, the northern bonus, things of that nature. When we changed the remission rates a number of years ago and included the northern bonus, the valuation allowance wasn't increased at that point in time. Now that we have the data to support the number that we need, we've updated that accordingly to ensure for that in our accounting. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I was hoping I could also get a similar explanation for Income Assistance. I see it is increasing by \$4

million from this present fiscal's revised main estimates. However, I see, if you actually go back two years, it's about the same amount. My understanding is that Income Assistance is always somewhat oversubscribed. Is this number more a correction of what the Income Assistance budget should be, or are we expecting a \$4 million increase in the amount of Income Assistance due to, perhaps, the economic downturn caused by COVID-19? Can I just get some explanation for that \$4 million increase? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The Member points out that, if you look at the 2019-2020 actuals, it is similar to the number that is in the budget this year. That's because every year Income Assistance is oversubscribed, and the department has to come back for a supplementary appropriation. After a few years of that happening over and over again, we were now able to build it into the budget. The actual budget more accurately reflects what we are spending. This is as the Member stated, perhaps, a correction, because we know every year that we are going to go over, and now our budget reflects that expectation. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I understand that we are creating two separate Income Assistance streams or three, one for seniors, one for persons with disabilities, and then there will be the normal Income Assistance remaining there. Can I just get an update on the progress of that work and when we expect those new streams to actually come into force? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The Member is correct. That is something that is in the mandate, and it's part of a larger Income Assistance review. For some detail on timelines, I can ask Mr. Saturnino to elaborate. Thank you.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, the Income Assistance review is a project that we are just starting on right now. We are currently in phase 1, which is doing some preliminary research, and what we expect is that we will be doing program planning later in 2021. We will be doing engagements and program implementation in 2022, and the programs would come into effect sometime around March-April 2023. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I believe the department used to do annual Income Assistance reports. Perhaps they still do, and I just can't find them online. What I would like to see is, in light of us doing this new work, a breakdown of how many Income Assistance clients fit into seniors, how many fit into disabilities, and how many fit into the third category of other people on Income Assistance. Does the Minister have those figures? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Yes, I have those figures. They are in the paper that I'm shuffling through. Mr. Saturnino might know that off by heart, so how about I hand it to him? Thank you.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The breakdown is 70 percent of the clients are aged 19 to 59; 19 percent of the clients are disabled, and 11 percent of the clients are seniors. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think it makes sense to break out those categories, especially just in that reporting for people who are seniors and disabilities is different. I note we already payroll them, so that makes sense. I have some concerns about the way Income Assistance works with other programs. Do we have figures of how many of our Income Assistance clients are in public housing? I know that there has been some work to make those systems work better. I still don't believe there is cohesion when someone gets an Income Assistance cheque and then it goes to public housing, or someone misses their Income Assistance appointment and gets cut off, and it affects public housing. I still don't get the sense that those systems are working seamlessly. Can the Minister speak to, A, if we know how many Income Assistance clients are in public housing, and B, any work being done to make sure that those two different departments are talking to each other? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. We could probably figure that out. I'm not sure how easy that would be, but after this, I'll hand it to Mr. Saturnino. Part of the review is to address issues just like that.

The Member points out we really have two social housing programs in the territory. Income Assistance participates in one, and housing is the other. There must be a better way, and there must be improvements that can be made. We are looking at that. Perhaps Mr. Saturnino has more information. Thank you.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. We don't have the actual figures for the number of clients in public housing readily available today, but we definitely can provide that information. With regards to working with LHOs, inventory programs really do go hand-in-hand. On a daily basis, our front-line delivery staff are working with tenant relations officers, especially in terms of common needs for clients. Where we have clients who are either in public housing or on the low-cost housing wait list, we would work with those common clients to try to come to a positive solution. From the perspective of the Income Assistance program, there are definitely benefits to clients residing in public housing, and in many communities, it is the only option for housing. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Is there a maximum to what you can receive on Income Assistance? The housing pay scale is very clear to understand. There's a minimum and a maximum, and it applies to income. Income Assistance, being a needs-based program, is much more complex, but I'm wondering if there is essentially a maximum built into the Income Assistance program? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The amounts available to Income Assistance clients are laid out in the regulations. There are schedules at the back that list what amounts individuals can receive for what categories, and that varies based on community, number of dependents, and so on. There are some provisions embedded in the regulations themselves. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The maximum would be if I took all the schedules and added them all up, and the maximum would actually not really be realistic in the schedules because I think it goes up to 12 children or

something like that. Perhaps that is possible in the NWT and true.

My concern, and I've expressed this to the Minister before, is that I think there are cases where, if you are on the lowest end of the housing pay scale, you pay something like \$80 a month in rent. Then if you have multiple children and you're also getting daycare subsidized, you're in this position where you just really shouldn't move. You shouldn't adjust anything because if you lose public housing, all of a sudden, you're going to try to pay market rent, and you don't want to lose public housing. If you start working too much, then that's going to affect your housing pay scale. I'm still not convinced that the systems are working together.

As part of the Income Assistance review, I think the Minister already said this, but will we be looking at ways to make sure that we don't get people stuck in a so-called welfare trap or that we don't get people stuck in these situations where working or changing their lifestyle all of a sudden becomes a huge deterrent? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. That's the plan. The Income Assistance program, as it is, was created years ago. There have been changes to it. There have been things that have been exempted over the last number of years, and that has actually added to the costs. There is still the issue that the Member is talking about. It's easier for people, sometimes, it makes more sense for them to stay on Income Assistance than to get a job or go get training. It could be the amount. It could also be circumstances in the community. The whole reason we are doing the review is to address those issues. Thank you.

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

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** Mahsi, Madam Chair. My subject is the Senior Home Heating Subsidy. First of all, I just want to thank the department for looking after the heating supply for our seniors in my community and in the NWT. It's very much appreciated. I had a wood supplier in my community. I didn't get all of the information out of him, but he was citing that he may get out of the business because one of the problems that he was citing is that it was taking too long to get paid. These guys are just small businesses. Especially if you are in the wood business, it's very, very tough. I am just wondering if you know what is the length it takes before they get paid and whether we can shorten it to maybe a day or so or if the cheque can

be cut right in the office, same as for our IA clients? Mahsi.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. It's supposed to be a pretty quick turnaround. It's paid on invoice, and when there are issues like the Member is raising, if those are raised with the department, then we do our best to fix them immediately. I can ask Mr. Saturnino if he has further information. Thank you.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, as the Minister noted, we process paperwork as quickly as we can once it's received, so assuming that we have a client who is approved to receive wood and they have selected a wood supplier, we would look to process that as quickly as possible. The process to pay suppliers is a little bit different than income assistance in that we do pay income assistance directly to clients versus, in Senior Home Heating Subsidy, payments are issued through the GNWT's SAM system, so there is a little bit of an extra process in there. However, as the Minister said, we would do that as quickly as possible. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Mr. Saturnino. Member for Deh Cho.

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** Mahsi for that. It's interesting. If it's the supplier that is going through the SAM system, that is 20 days, no short-cuts, but the amount of time, still it's not guaranteed. When I worked with Infrastructure, I know that there was an early-release payment program where the contractor was docked 2 percent for that. When we first worked with it, it was a turnaround of two to three days max, but when SAM got introduced, contractors were waiting three weeks later for an early-release payment. I am saying I am wondering if you could look at it to help these small wood suppliers. The fuel suppliers, they are okay because they are large outfits, but the wood cutters, we are getting different contractors every now and then. If we could shorten it specifically for this industry, it's a unique industry. I am just wondering if we could look at it with a different lens, as somebody puts it. Mahsi.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I believe the fuel suppliers are paid up front, so when someone is approved, the fuel supplier gets the total amount. There is one payment and there are no delays,

obviously, for subsequent payments. I am happy to have this discussion with the department. I will leave it at that. I will have that discussion with the department because this is not the first time I have heard this issue. Thank you.

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

**MR. BONNETROUGE:** Mahsi. I am glad that I reminded you to consider it, so no further questions on that one. Mahsi.

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

**MR. NORN:** Marsi cho, Madam Chair. I am just looking at the activity description, and I just thought about my Member's statement earlier today, traditional economy. A long time before this system was put in place, if you did not work outside and work hard, you did not eat that night, but our times are different now. I still remember stories of some of the elders telling me what it was like before, and now that we have these systems in place, they are here. That is what we have to work with. Just a little more technical, I looked at one of the line items here, for Income Assistance and just for the actuals, revised numbers. Last year, we all know that CERB was implemented. I am just wanting to see if you have noticed any changes in terms of the demand for your department since CERB was implemented? Marsi cho. That is for the Minister. My apologies, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. It's hard to compare this last year to previous years, considering that we went through a shutdown during a global pandemic, but there was an increase. I can ask Mr. Saturnino to discuss some of the changes that we saw in terms of increases and subsequent decreases in numbers. Thank you.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes. Typically, what we have been seeing over the last few years is around a 7 percent increase in expenditures in Income Assistance, which would be reflective of what you are seeing as far as increases in the budget for the year. Over the last year, with the exemption of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, we exempted a lot of that, or we exempted that income as well as a number of other income sources. As a result, our expenditures definitely increased, so there was a significant increase, I believe to around 17 percent for the one year. That was between April and November. Since

November, we have started to count the Canada Recovery Benefit, and we are starting decreased expenditures as a result of that. It is balancing itself out, but there are definitely increased expenditures. We are still completing financial reviews on files because we did payroll clients for seven months, so those financial reviews will tell the true story of how much CERB money was counted or was collected by clients and exempted, as well. Thank you.

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

**MR. NORN:** Marsi cho, Madam Chair. Yes, I am just trying to understand a little better now. I am hearing that there is going to be a review, so do we have some timelines on when we are going to get some firm numbers back? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I will pass it to Mr. Saturnino for that, but yes, I did not want to let this opportunity to learn pass. I said we need to find out exactly what happened and how this extra income affected people and all of that. I have asked the department to do that work. They have graciously said, "Of course," so Mr. Saturnino might have some more information. Thank you.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. We are currently working with clients. Since the changes were made in November, we did want to provide them with a good amount of time to be able to provide that information, and so the deadline that we had given to clients was January 15<sup>th</sup>, so we are just past that. Of course, financial reviews would follow, and in instances where clients have not provided the information, of course, we are working with those clients to get the information we need to conduct the reviews. Thank you.

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

**MR. NORN:** Thank you. That will be a good high-level question kind of to start off with. I had something a little more detailed for my riding. Is it too far to go to page 47 for the active positions? Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. In my riding, in Deninu Kue, about two-and-a-half years ago, there was an income support worker who was there. I am not sure if they were part-time or full-time off the top of my head, but I know that that position was never filled. Is that still on the books, or is, at some point, this position going to be actively recruited? Marsi cho.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I will ask Mr. Saturnino.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Mr. Saturnino.

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. There is a .5 PY position in Fort Resolution, and the position is currently staffed, working out of the Deninu Kue office. Thank you.

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

**MR. NORN:** Okay. No. Thank you for that, so that is a half-time position. It was reported to me. Maybe I am wrong. Maybe if I could just get this clarified. About two-and-a-half years ago, there was a full-time position there, as well. If we could maybe get back to me that information if that is the case? Because there is, I think, a service gap there because I do get quite a bit of calls for my community members in Deninu Kue. I have to call to Hay River quite a bit to get service. If this continues, I would like to see if we could get the additional support for that half-time position. Marsi cho.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. We're happy to look into that issue and see what's going on, and we have information about the number of applications and the volume of calls. Plus, any information that MLAs bring to us, we always look into, as well. We can look into this and get back to the Member.

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

**MR. NORN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. On page 46 for the home heating subsidy, I do get calls on this from quite a few elders in my riding. This one is a well-used program. I'm just looking at some of the numbers here. In terms of being oversubscribed, maybe undersubscribed, how is this program looking? Is it being used to its fullest extent? That's my question for the Minister. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. To go back to the Member's last question, I think it was 2010 that there was a full-time position, and after that, it was moved to a part-time position. This program, I can

ask Mr. Saturnino to expand on whether it's fully subscribed or not, the Senior Home Heating Subsidy. Thank you.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. In 2018, we undertook a review and made changes to the program. On April 1, 2020, we increased the support under the program, and we are anticipating that the program will be near fully subscribed in the current fiscal year. Thank you.

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

**MR. NORN:** Thank you. Last question, and perhaps a comment: this is really important, having a subsidy in the first place for our elders. They work all their lives, and they have to live off their CPP, their old age pension. It's so expensive to just get by with our food and whatnot. This a really important program. I'll have some other higher-level questions regarding our supports for our seniors, but I think that this is definitely a really important program. It takes the pressure off our senior citizens, like I said, who worked really hard and who need to heat their homes in winter. Right now, it's really cold, and I think it's a really important program. I'll just leave that as a comment. Thank you.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Actually, this is a great segue because I also wanted to ask about the Senior Home Heating Subsidy. When the department was stating that they made some changes in 2018, I believe those were the changes of moving from a volume allocation to seniors to a monetary allocation. Is that correct, please? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. That's correct.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think the Minister knows where I'm going with this. I have had a lot of the seniors comment that this change was detrimental to them. It's hard for them to budget. They don't know necessarily then how much fuel they are going to get each year; it's very dependent upon oil prices. This year was great. We did see a drop in prices, and some indicated that they actually did do an extra fill-up at some point to

take advantage. However, it does lead to a lot of uncertainty and stress when they don't know and may have to purchase, in a particularly cold year, more fuel for themselves. My question is, for the department: will there be any move back towards making this a volume-based subsidy versus a monetary one? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. In addition to changing how fuel is allocated, the thresholds were also increased to allow more seniors to access the program. In previous years, before the change, the program was actually underutilized. After the changes, there were more seniors eligible and more seniors taking advantage of more benefits. In that sense, it has been a good move.

However, it was unfortunate that, the year of the change, there was also a spike in oil prices, and that really hit a lot of people. That was a lot of the concern. The program, as it is now, is intended to fund about 80 percent of the average heating cost of a home in one of the three different zones that we have. It's not a 100 percent grant; it's an 80 percent subsidy. That being said, these changes were made a few years ago, and it's good practice to always review a program after it's been running a few years. We are undertaking that work right now, and we will see if there are improvements that can be made. Thank you.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm glad to hear that. I'm always a big fan of going back and looking at what we're doing. Then if we do have a particularly cold season, is there any mechanism or such where, if an elder or senior finds that they've maxed out on their amounts, they can apply to get additional funding or support to help them in the case that it's an unanticipated expense that they didn't have? Thanks.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. These come across my desk all the time as Minister from MLAs where a senior in their community has used up their entitlement. I think, so far, everyone I have seen has been eligible for Income Assistance to help get them fuel, so I haven't seen anyone who has run dry yet. Thank you.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. My next question, then, still sort of to do with the senior

supports: I notice that it's for low- to modest-income NWT seniors, but to maybe actually removing the cap or the thresholds, or the income testing I guess it's called, so that all of the seniors contribute? What I look at the fact that each person coming into the territory brings \$37,000 to the territory. For the number of seniors that may be over this cap or amount, I feel like we're almost kind of punishing them for staying or for being successful in their lives. I think my colleague from Thebacha has made these kinds of comments in other areas, as well. We want seniors to stay. They're a vital part of our community. They provide a whole bunch of supports around elections and things that others don't volunteer for. To me, to punish a few -- "punish" isn't the right word, but to leave out a few just because they happen to have been a bit more successful in life, I'm just wondering if there's a look at maybe removing that from the department. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. We value our elders, our seniors. That's why we probably have the most generous benefits to seniors in the country by far. That's why, often, people move up here if they have children working up here. I know plenty of people who have moved to the territory to take advantage of that after they have retired. There would be financial implications to a move like that, and it's something that, going through the review, we always look at every option. That will be something that obviously will be discussed, but I can't make any commitments as to whether or not that would happen. Thank you.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I agree. I do think that we have great benefits for our seniors. I did hear from a lot, actually, after my comments the first week of session, that a lot of them were quite happy with the supports we have. I just want to ensure that a lot of those stay in place and that we extend them to everybody possible. Sticking with my seniors theme, I'm looking at the Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit. I'm not quite sure if I understand what that is. I apologize if the department has explained that. Maybe, if I could get a little bit of an explanation as to what that is, but also, does the department anticipate these subsidies or benefits for seniors increasing more in the next while? Are we seeing a larger amount of seniors staying and applying for these programs? Are we going to see a continuing trend upwards? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. For that level of detail, I would like to ask Mr. Saturnino to answer. Thank you.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit is a program that provides financial assistance to seniors with low income to help them with the high cost of living. It is a legislative program, so it does have an act, and it provides a monthly benefit to help low-income seniors with living costs. It's eligible to individuals who are receiving the old age security and guaranteed income supplement. With regards to looking at that particular program, it's not something that's been discussed. It would be something that would require us to look further into it. Thank you.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Maybe if just the Minister could commit to coming back to me with a little bit more information. I just really would like to get an idea of whether we think that we're going to see, sort of, accelerating or skyrocketing costs for seniors, or is it going to be somewhat that steady creep that we see in maybe other areas, or do we see this kind of exponentially? That might be a Bureau of Statistics question on the number of seniors, so I'll just leave it at that. Thank you, that's all.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Yes, we can find out some information about what we expect to see with the number of seniors. I know there is work going on in other departments, as well, and I'm sure that we are part of that and are actively using that information. We can get that for the Members. Thank you.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Sorry, I forgot I noted one more question and, again, I apologize if this has been discussed already. I'm looking at the Income Security initiative that was part of the contribution to the Salvation Army to provide effective community resources. I noted that it was in the main estimates, the department had it in the main estimates and the actuals. It has now been removed, or it wasn't spent. I'm not quite sure. To me, that seems like a great area in which we continue to fund community supports. I do recognize it's only Yellowknife-based; however, maybe just a bit of an explanation as to why it is disappearing off the books? Thanks.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. That support is still being provided. We have other programs where it's more appropriate to provide it through. I can ask Mr. Saturnino, or how about Mr. Shannon. He hasn't had much to say lately. I'll ask Mr. Shannon to answer. Thank you.

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

**MR. SHANNON:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Madam Chair. As the Minister alluded to, that funding is now being provided through some of our federal agreements that show up under the labour development and advanced education activity, and the funding that was originally used out of the income security budget to go toward that is now going toward an additional two client service officers in the North Slave region to deal with the increased demand there. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. My question will start also with the Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit and the heating subsidy. Both of them are based on income. Right?

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** That's correct.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** It's disturbing that the people who have given the most to us, our seniors, our elders, with the knowledge and the traditional knowledge and everything else, that we always have thresholds for seniors. I am very much about universal senior care, and, of course, we have to start somewhere. I know I'm going to start with housing, but I also am just pointing to the fact, Madam Chair, that these two things are based on income. I think it's time that we start thinking in a different manner in the future, and I just want to see what the Minister has to say about that. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I've heard the Member's advocacy on behalf of seniors and how the GNWT funds them. I know that we are working on a seniors strategy and, through that work, I think we are going to be having these discussions and come to some sort of an approach together. That

work is ongoing, and her comments are definitely noted. Thank you.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to get into the Student Financial Assistance. I want to know what the daily rate is for a single student who is attending classes in post-secondary. Is there an amount that is available, Madam Chair? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Like most things, it depends on what grant or loan you've applied for, whether or not you have dependents, but I can ask Mr. Saturnino to provide a concise description of what an average student might expect, in terms of support from SFA. Thank you.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. A single student attending full-time, assuming that the Member is speaking of, let's say, a living allowance, a single student attending full-time would be eligible for \$850 a month. We don't typically break that down to the daily rate, just a monthly benefit. Thank you.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Madam Chair, I couldn't hear him. Could he just repeat that please, Madam Chair?

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** It's \$850 a month.

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Madam Chair, on \$850 a month, that's for a single student. If you have one child or two children, could you please tell me what the daily amount is? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. That's just the basic grant. There is also a repayable loan that individuals can apply for which is another, I believe, \$1,400. In addition, there is up to \$2,400 for tuition; there is \$550 for books. There is more than just the \$850, but I believe, if there was a dependent, it would be \$1,250; the \$850 would turn into \$1,250. Thank you.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. A student with one child, and yes, I know that some of the costs are covered with tuition and books and some of those things. Even in Fort Smith, which has one of the lowest costs of living in the Northwest Territories and I'm very proud of that, \$1,250 a month with one child when childcare is \$60 a day, that is unacceptable, Madam Chair. I would really appreciate that the Minister starts adjusting the budget to ensure that subsidized childcare for the future students of the polytechnic university are subsidized. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. We had an extensive discussion about this in the House. I realize we have to do more to help some of the students that we have. As we transform to a polytechnic, that's one of the things we're looking at. If someone really is attending school, collecting SFA, and needs childcare and they qualify for income assistance, they can also apply for that. Income Assistance will help them out. To the Member's point, I understand that she is advocating for subsidized childcare for students, and we're trying to figure out how to get there. Thank you.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Madam Chair, that's \$1,250 for the lowest cost of living in Fort Smith. I just wonder how much it is, how a student could survive on that in Yellowknife or the Beaufort, in those campuses. That is unacceptable, and subsidized childcare for the future polytechnic university students must be in this budget in the future. I think that it's time; the time has come. We talk about everything else. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Did you have any further comments, Minister?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Sure. We are doing a review of Student Financial Assistance, as well. It has been a number of years since those numbers changed. I believe it was 2015, the last time that there was an increase, and obviously costs have gone up. While we do this review, we're also looking at other things that might need to change. I'll just note that SFA is currently structured so that it covers about 80 percent of the cost of attending a post-secondary institution in Edmonton, so not necessarily in the North, where costs are higher. It is one of, if not the, most generous student financial assistance programs in Canada by a long shot. A lot of people in the South are quite jealous of what we have. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Did you have any further questions? Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Are there any further questions under the income security, Members? Seeing no further questions, please turn to page 45. Education, Culture and Employment, income security, operations expenditure summary, 2021-2022 Main Estimates, \$60,336,000. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, committee. We will take a short recess, about 5 minutes.

---SHORT RECESS

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Committee, we are back to order. All right, we are going to move on to labour development and advanced education, beginning on page 52. Questions? Member for Kam Lake.

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The line item I would like to start with is the apprenticeship and occupational certification line item. Can the Minister tell us if this is where the apprenticeship wage subsidy comes from? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Yes, it does.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. One of the things that I hear about from people in my riding is that they want to be able to support apprentices, they want to be involved in the success of apprentices. However, if they take on somebody who is not an apprentice to work around the office, they get wage subsidy up to minimum wage. If they take on an apprentice, the wage subsidies are at \$8 an hour. My question is: to further support employer participation in trades development, is ECE willing to -- and maybe this is not the place for this question, and I am sure the Minister will tell me. Is there room within that budget to increase the apprenticeship wage subsidy? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. There is no room in the budget to increase it. The larger wage subsidy is funded through federal government programs, and they have a lot more money. The

other wage subsidies, the \$8 wage subsidies, are funded by the GNWT. We have to do our best to stretch our dollars as far as we can, and we don't have enough to fund all of the apprentices in the territory with that budget. Even as is, we fall quite short of that. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. How many apprentices does this fund every year? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I'll ask Mr. Saturnino for that.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The subsidy could probably fund between 80 to 100 apprentices in a year, and currently we have 317. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** The budget is built to fund 80 to 100; however, right now, it's funding 317 apprentices. Is that correct?

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. Can you clarify that for us, Minister?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. There are 300-and-some apprentices. The budget can't fund them all, and it's not funding them all. It is funding I think it's about 28 percent of the apprentices, is what we have the budget to fund. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The other 220 people who are apprentices, if their employers come to access this fund, it is fully subscribed, and they are unable to get wage subsidies for their apprentices. Is that correct? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I'd ask Mr. Saturnino to expand on this. Thank you.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Presently, the program funds only the first and second year of an apprenticeship. Because of that, because it is a limited budget and it can only fund a certain number of apprentices, we have to be very targeted in terms of determining where the subsidy is best suited to help an employer. Because new apprentices tend to require a lot more support and a lot more training, the subsidy does currently fund the earlier years of the apprenticeship. Whereas, in years three and four, the apprentice becomes more valuable. They are able to work more independently. They don't require the same level of support, and they're starting by that point to start to make the employer money. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to move on to the labour market programs. One of the programs that's in the labour market programs is the nominee program. One of the things that I hear about most often in the constituency that I serve is people concerned, especially right now with COVID, that we're going to lose a lot of people from the Northwest Territories over the course of the next one to two years. What this program, the nominee program, supports is people who are moving from out-of-country to Canada, and so that's an investment that the GNWT has decided to make. However, what I hear is that it's a lot easier to work through immigration programs in places like Manitoba and Newfoundland, and so we might actually stand not only to lose Canadians who have decided to move up to the Northwest Territories, but also people from other parts of the world who have moved up to the Northwest Territories. That stands to kind of create a perfect storm when it comes to our federal transfer dollars, so I am wondering: is this enough to support our investment of bringing people to the territory? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I could say that. You could say that. We've had our best year in terms of the number of nominees who have come to the territory in 2020, and that goes back at least about 11 years. We are improving. We've just had our best year ever, so we're doing something right. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. No. I appreciate that. I think congratulations is in order to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment for that one, and now our job is to

make sure that we keep people here. As far as the employment fund that is also under labour market programs, does that include any regional training partnerships? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** I would ask Mr. Saturnino to answer that.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm not exactly sure of the particular line that the Member is speaking of. Generally speaking, regional training partnerships don't have a budget. They're a group of engaged, interested stakeholders from around the region that have a vested interest in training, and they come together to collaborate on different initiatives. They typically bring funding to the table in order to deliver community- and regional-based training programs. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just wanted to confirm that no GNWT dollars, then, are involved. It's federal and private dollars. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I can ask Mr. Saturnino for his take on this. Although we might need some clarification about exactly what the Member is talking about, but I can ask Mr. Saturnino.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. In going and working with these particular regional training partnerships, ECE would bring its suite of programs to the table, which would include territorial, federal, and we would typically work with Indigenous governments who also have their own training dollars. We would try to collectively work together to develop and deliver training. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm wondering if programs to help persons with disabilities get learning assessments so that they are able to use that for post-secondary training or education, if there is a line item here for that? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I'd like to ask Mr. Saturnino to take this.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. We do have learning and diagnostic assessments that are available, and we fund that through the workforce development agreement. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Does ECE work with the FASD diagnostic clinic in that process? Thank you.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you. We contract the services to a third party and, through that third party, they would work in conjunction with any relevant partners and service providers that would be dependent on the needs of the individual. As it currently stands, we had a five-year contract which is currently going back out again to secure a new contractor to deliver these services for likely another five years. Thank you.

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

**MS. CLEVELAND:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just a couple of more questions on this one here. Can the Minister just confirm what line item this comes out of and if this is a growing line item for the next few years or is expected to grow over the next four years? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The workforce development agreement is a federal agreement, and I can ask Mr. Saturnino to talk about prospects for that fund growing. Thank you.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Looking at page 53, the funding for the workforce development agreement would be within the labour market programs line, which is \$7.5 million. Under this particular agreement, we are still receiving additional dollars that were approved through Budget 2017 from the federal government, and so for a six-year period, we're getting additional

investments into the fund which will expire in 2023. Thank you.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am just looking at the line item for the Small Community Employment Support. To me, this seems like a great area where we could be advancing our mandate to increase employment in small communities. I do notice that we spent more in 2019-2020 than predicted, but we've gone back down. I'm just curious to know if there's a push to increase funding to this fund or to this contribution as well as some of the others similar to it to get more money into the small communities for employment there. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I agree this is a great program. It gives money directly to communities, and they employ people, and they get work done in the community. It is straightforward, and it is getting money into people's pockets and getting them experience. The increase in 2019-2020 is due to a supplementary estimate. I think it came through a supplementary estimate that I think was the result of a deal between Regular Members and Cabinet in the last Assembly. We have gone back to the base funding for this program. Going forward, I am always looking at programs like this to see if there are opportunities through different avenues to increase them, but there is nothing on the books right now. The plan is to maintain the status quo for this year. Thank you.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Back to the workforce development agreement my colleague was raising, the numbers are sort of a little bit over around, I know the department said it's a federal program. I am just curious to know if the fluctuation is just due to uptake on the program or whether or not there were other situations that occurred that caused such a low number, just generally a bad COVID year. I am not sure, so maybe some clarification. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** I will ask Mr. Saturnino.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. If we are looking at page 54, the workforce development

agreement is divided into grants and contributions, two lines, which collectively would show that, in that particular year, there were expenditures of just over \$2 million, which is actually the amount that we would receive. In 2021-2022, we are actually getting additional dollars; in 2019-2020, we received just about \$2.2 million, and we spent just about \$2.1 million. Although they are split between grants and contributions, we can spend within each line as long as we do not go over the total value for that particular year. Thank you.

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

**MS. NOKLEBY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes. Thank you for that. I completely missed the line item in the grants. It's been a long day, so I appreciate that being pointed out. Just one quick comment: I always want to get a plug in for Skills Canada. They are not getting any increased funding. I do think it's a great program where we could be looking to keep some of our youth busier as they are not able to maybe do other things, like some of their sports travel, et cetera. I am just going to always put the plug in to increase their funding. Then I think that is it for me. I am good. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member for Great Slave. Members, just to remind you, this goes right to page 63, so it has a lot of information. It's not just the first little two or three pages. Member for Nunakput.

**MR. JACOBSON:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Just in regard to the small community employment support, I am wondering: the trailers that we have sitting in Inuvik outside Aurora College, what is happening with those trailers, and why are they parked in Inuvik when they could be used in the communities? Are they looking towards that, or do we have to apply to get them into the communities, per community? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. If the Member is speaking about the mobile trades units, they have not been utilized this past year because the Chief Public Health Officer has limited in-person instruction for adult education. That has really limited our ability to use those, so they have not been active. In 2019 was the last time that they were used, and they were scheduled to be used in 2020. The pandemic happened, so they have not been. However, we are anxious to get back to using those and delivering programs and utilizing them more, as well, because it looks like they run maybe one or two programs a year, and I am sure we can do more. Thank you.

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

**MR. JACOBSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. No. Just in regard to that, is there a list? Who do you talk to in regard to getting those mobile trade units into the communities, for instance Paulatuk, Ulukhaktok, or to get them out for woodworking programs and that? People are in their bubble anyway in regard to social bubble because you cannot get in there, only fly. Everybody is watched when you do land, and they stay away from those outsiders, so to say. That being said, we need that access to the communities for trades, especially woodworking stuff. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Yes. I am sure that the Member can call the college, or whoever wants to use them could reach out to the regional Aurora College representatives. There is a plan to get them out, and I can provide the committee with information about what programs have been run out of those and what are the plans for the future because I know that we are chomping at the bit to get them out there. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Are there any further questions? Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Yes. In the last Assembly, the Minister and I, we were on the same side of the House, and we did fight for an increase to the small community employment fund. Part of the problem that we had identified at that time was that the funds could not really be used for job creation. They were only sort of a subsidy to small communities to try to subsidize. There had to be somebody matching the funds. Can I hear from the Minister whether that has actually transitioned to more of a job-creation program and whether there has been any evaluation done of the effectiveness of it? Thanks.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Yes. As the money first rolled out, there were some lessons learned, and it has become much more accessible, more flexible, and there has been a review. I can ask Mr. Saturnino to expand on this. Thank you.

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

**MR. SATURNINO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes. In follow-up to changing the program in 2018, the department did commit to conducting a review of

the program. This was done in 2020, and I believe the report itself was shared with standing committee in the fall. The review was quite positive. It found the program was achieving many of the objects and outcomes that it was intended to. It was providing benefits to the communities. It is important to note that, with this particular fund, it's the communities that decide how they want to use those dollars. They can use it to subsidize a number of positions, or they could use it to fund a more significant number of positions. They could also decide if they wanted to use it for seasonal-type positions or more full-time-type positions. It is very flexible. It is intended to be that way. The communities wanted to have the ability to make those decisions, and we have designed the program to do so. Thank you.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Yes. I appreciate the response, and I will try to search out the review of it. That sounds exactly like the direction we had asked for, so that is great. I want to move on to the education authorities programs and services page in here. Sorry, there are a couple of pages in here. The one page that shows active positions, it looks like there are some regions where there are going to be fewer full-time teachers who are funded, a few regions where there is going to be maybe an increase. Is that driven by enrolment figures? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. One of the big changes is the child and youth care counsellors. Right now, those are funded positions from ECE, and those are being transitioned to Health and Social Services. The funding is being removed from the education authorities and going to Health and Social Services, but if there are declining enrolments, that often could result in a decline in funded positions, as well. Thank you.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair, and thanks to the Minister for that clarification. In the last Assembly, the department was talking about developing a policy so that, if there was a decline in enrolment over a certain percentage, that an education authority wouldn't see a huge drop in their funding right away. It would be transitioned over maybe two or three years just to make sure that they didn't have to cut a whole bunch of teachers loose and lose programs right away. I think that's how they do it in Ontario and Manitoba and maybe one other jurisdiction that was being

looked at. Did the department ever complete work on that policy, and if so, can the department or the Minister commit to share it with us as Regular MLAs? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The big drop off in financial support occurs when a school board falls below, I think, 500 students enrolled. There are no schools right now who are facing that. That work isn't as urgent as, perhaps, it was a couple of years ago. What we are doing is undertaking a review of the entire funding formula, and that will be part of it. That is part and parcel of the Education Act modernization. Thank you.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. If I read between the lines of what the Minister said, then the policy was never finished, and it's being rolled into the larger review of formula funding for the DEAs? Is that correct? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Schools are funded according to the funding framework, and that is essentially the funding policy. There was some work done to look at different jurisdictions and how they fund schools, and that work was shared with Members. The funding formula is what it was, and it will be reviewed as part of the Education Act modernization. Thank you.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Maybe I'm not getting it, but I remember seeing a discussion paper on this. They looked at three jurisdictions, I think Ontario, Manitoba, and somewhere else, and they were looking at changing it so that there wouldn't be this big drop off. Was that policy work ever finished, or is the Minister saying that that's now being rolled into the larger review of the overall funding formula for DEAs? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. There is often research done that doesn't result in a new policy. What the Member is referencing is research that was done. It didn't result in a new policy. In that sense, yes, that policy work has ended, and we have moved onto a much larger review of the funding framework. That work will, of course, inform

the funding framework review, so perhaps in that sense, it's not complete. Thank you.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Thanks for that. One of my favourite questions, too, is: what's the status now of the social work and teacher education program review for Aurora College? Those two were dropped several years ago, and I'm just wondering if they are ever going to get reinstated. Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. Those reviews are both being undertaken. There have been some delays due to COVID because of the fact that we needed to get people into the territory to review the programs. There has been some work virtually done, but I can get the Member more information about this, as well. We are not quite on schedule where we want it to be. Thank you.

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

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. This caused a lot of consternation in the last Assembly. As I could see, it was just a decision that seemed to be made by some of the senior management within the college to cut these two programs because they were told they had to cut their budget by 10 percent by Cabinet in the last Assembly. These were just the way to do it. While there might have been some issues with enrolment and completion by some of the students, the real issue was the failure to provide childcare and support to the students, who were mainly women. I'm hoping that those things are going to get considered in the review. Can the Minister give me some assurance that that's going to be looked at? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Sorry. Was the question whether the programs are going to be reviewed? If the Member could just repeat the question, I just lost him at the end there. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Member, will you repeat your question?

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I'll try to keep it shorter. As I understand, most of the individuals who were enrolled in the two programs were women. There was some issue of completion. From what we heard from some of the students, the issue was not so much that the programs were not useful or that they were not graduating students,

but it was the inability to provide childcare and support for the students so that they could actually complete the programs. Is that going to be a consideration in the review of whether these two programs should be reinstated, that we need to provide better supports for the students and childcare? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I don't have the details of the review in front of me, but I can let everyone know that there were more than just a couple issues. That's why we undertook the foundational review of the college in the first place and why we are undertaking this effort to transform it into a polytechnic university. Of course, part of that transformation means reviewing programs at a standard that a university needs to. We are using a review that meets any international standards. The program is being reviewed to the standard it should be, and I can find out specifically if those elements are part of that. Thank you.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I want to make a comment on the whole headquarters of the college. I am very happy that Fort Smith will be the education centre for the North, as usual. I am happy also that the Beaufort-Delta will be taking the climate change part. I think that's important because of all of the conditions in the Arctic that are changing. I'm excited about the whole rollout of the polytechnic university.

First of all, before I do this, I want to ensure that all the instructors at all three colleges, especially the Fort Smith campus, the Aurora College there, that we have a wide variety of knowledge people there, who are very engaged in their programs and engaged in what they do, and they contribute to the community. I also want to ensure that -- it was a big strain on the community of Fort Smith when we had all these announcements, "The headquarters has to go here," and "The headquarters has to go there," and the right decision was made.

We have some incredible programs. The teacher education program has been there for many years, and a lot of people who went through the teacher education program advanced to other careers. One of those people I know, and there's quite a few of them. Some of them are working for you now, and some of them have gone on to become MP of the Northwest Territories. There's a lot of potential. Most of them also spoke their own languages. I want to ensure that the teacher education program keeps its -- because they offer the four years, now. One year is kind of off on the side with the

Saskatchewan University, but I'd like to see in the future that the whole Bachelor of Education degree will be in place in the community to ensure that, because we always need teachers. We are bringing them in from all over the place, and I think it's time that we start mentoring our own to ensure that they are also capable to teaching at the schools. We do have some who are in Fort Smith, but I'm sure that the communities would prefer their own teachers from their area, speaking the language, and that's extremely important. I just want to see what the Minister has to say on that, Madam Chair. Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The transformation team released an areas of specialization document that outlines what the polytechnic will be focused on in the future, and teaching is featured prominently in there. We know that we need teachers. ECE would love to fund a program that provides teachers. We understand that, so pending the outcome of the review, I look forward to a world-class teaching program. However, I will say that we will be reinstating an arm's-length board, truly arm's length, not a puppet board. We have to work with them, so I can't sit here and make commitments for a future board. That being said, I'm very supportive of such a program. Thank you.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Madam Chair, I look forward to an arm's-length board, and I hope that the arm's-length board will be choosing the new president. I look forward to evolving into a polytechnic university, and I am very happy that the headquarters is in Fort Smith. I also want to ask about the ENR program. The ENR program is extremely important to the whole Northwest Territories, a very successful program with a lot of capability. I would also like to see the ENR program go into a full four-year program at the college. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. It's a world-class program. It might be the most well-known, most-respected program we have at the college, and I think that it's going to be a big part of the transformation. I don't run the college. I don't develop programs for the college. There is a bit of an arm's-length function still, but I think that's one of the areas that we're going to see strengthened. As we transform into a polytechnic, we are going to build on the successes, and that's one of the

successes. I look forward to seeing what that becomes in the years to come. Thank you.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I look forward to the review, and I'm sure we'll have lots of discussion in the future. I know that there is also a campus in Yellowknife, and I also want to make sure that we also have nurses. It's very important that we stop having locums. I think the whole program of nursing, we have to make sure we capture our people from the North to take these courses, and they transition into all our hospitals and health centres in the North. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** I agree. That's why we're doing this. We don't just deserve a northern polytechnic university; we need one. Thank you.

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

**MS. MARTSELOS:** No more questions.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I heard the Minister say that we will have an arm's-length board. Do we have an idea of when we will have that? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I think we're looking at October 2022 at this point. I'd have to check the implementation plan for the exact number. That's all public information, and I encourage all Members to read the documents that we're putting out at a furious pace now. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Can the Minister speak to what the plan is for the president of the college once the board is established, and the unit within ECE. Is the plan for those people to be transferred to the college? I see a bit of a problem if this is truly to be arm's-length, for the president to be remaining in the department and having essentially two jobs. Is the plan to wrap up the transformation unit? Thank you.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. What the board is going to do about the president, I can't tell the Member right now. I don't know. They're going to be the board. They are going to hire the president. However, I think what we need or what this forces us to do is build relationships. We need to create a product that a board is going to want to run with, and we want to be able to provide support to the board. We've had members of the transformation team engaged heavily in this for a number of years, and there will be a number of more years before this move is made final, and I would hope that the board would want to utilize that expertise as they move toward the plan that has been laid out. What exactly that is going to look like has yet to be determined, but we want to make sure that we continue down the path toward a world-class polytechnic. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Can the Minister speak to what is being done to increase enrolment presently? My concern is that this is a very ambitious goal, but I believe that Aurora College has about 800 full-time students. If you go over to Yukon College, which seems to be successfully transforming into a university, they had 5,600 full-time and part-time students, so they started at a much higher level of enrolment. If you look at other successful polytechnics we're modelling, they're more like 20,000 students; half the population of the territory. I'm not expecting us to ever get there, but I just don't think we can even start to be serious about this transformation with the amount of lack of students we have attending the college right now. What is being done to increase enrolment presently? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mister -- or Madam Chair. I was going to call you Mr. Speaker; I'm sorry. Thank you, Madam Chair. I can assure the Member we're very serious about a transformation, regardless of how many students we have. The fact that we have fewer students than we'd like is all the more reason to be even more serious about the transformation. What is being done is being done by the college, and there still is a separation. Even though there is a single number in here showing how much we are contributing, I'm not involved in the day-to-day operations of the college. That is done by a separate group of people. What I can point out, though, is that COVID has had a big impact on post-secondary enrolment across Canada, across the world, and so we obviously took a hit there. There are students who don't want to go online to learn. That being said, there will be face-to-face classes coming in the fall,

and we're hoping that people are anxious to get back. The college is doing its usual recruitment programs. I can provide written updates to the Members about what's going on, there, but I think that the low numbers that the Member is referencing are the impetus for this, one of the impetuses. They're not a deterrent; they're why we are doing this. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Do we have a sense of whether the college will transition out of the public service or the UNW after becoming a university? I know many university professors and tenures are not necessarily in unions or they are in university-specific unions. Will the employer relationship change in the college, or is any of that work contemplated? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think that is probably a question for the Minister of human resources. I'm not sure where we are with negotiations or anything right now, so I don't really want to touch on that. I think that there is a recognition that the college is not a traditional public service. It's a college, and it will be a university. They have different structures. However, I cannot say much more at this point. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. That is another item, I think, to be looked at. Then I think, if this is to be truly arm's length, probably the relationship that the entire college has to the GNWT needs to be looked at. I question the extent that a university professor can have academic freedom and still be a member of the public service, and I don't think the line is very clear right now. I guess that is a general comment.

To me, even if we are aiming for something like Yukon University, in those thousands of students number, we do not have that many students, we just do not have the graduates. To me, that has to be made up with southern students. I am not sure if there has necessarily been a desire to do that in the past. When the Minister uses words like "world-class," to me, that inherently means that international students want to come here, that they want to study, and we want to grow a college population made up of Southerners, non-Northerners.

I think that is one of the big tensions to the college in its past, and this entire debate is: are we building a college for northern graduates, of which we have

terrible graduation records? Most students, if you look at SFA data, want to go South in the first place, so are we building a university to attract southern students and international students, which come with tuition and money? Can the Minister speak to that tension of how we are going to attract students from out of territory? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I am not experiencing any tension. I think that, if we build a world-class polytechnic university that serves the needs of the residents of the territory, we will attract students from across Canada and international students. We have a lot to build on here. We talked about the ENR program. Earlier today, we were talking about climate-change research. We always talk about Indigenous languages. There is a lot that we can do in the territory that will attract people. If we have a quality post-secondary university with proper quality assurance mechanisms in place, proper supports for teachers, proper supports for students, we are going to attract southern students, and we are going to serve northern students. I do not think it's an and/or. I do not think there is any sort of trade-off. If we do it right, we will be able to serve everyone. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess I should comment. There probably is a way to do both, and it's not an and/or. I previously met with the executive director of Dechinta, and she was saying they keep getting more and more applications from the South. They are getting applications from other Indigenous governments all around the country who want their students to go and attend Dechinta classes. At some point, they have to make a decision about how much they want to have northern students versus letting them in, so I think that is a good thing. Every time I speak with Dechinta, they are a model of success for a post-secondary, I find them very inspiring. I know there was an agreement signed with College Nordique and with Dechinta to work in partnership in creating the polytechnic, but can I have an update on how the Minister views those two organizations fitting into the polytechnic transformation? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. The Member is correct. There was an MoU signed sometime last

year between the three organizations. I think it's similar to what I said earlier, that there are things in the territory that we can build on. Dechinta is something that the college can partner with, and they can both benefit from that relationship with each other, the same with College Nordique. They have a lot of skills that they can bring to the table, and I think there is a lot that can be done. I do not have a specific plan about there being a French first-language campus or an on-the-land program at the college, but anything is possible because right now there is a very good relationship between the three institutions. I think, with that in place and with this transformation, we are going to see some big things happening. Thank you.

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

**MR. JOHNSON:** I am not sure I will necessarily be quick. I wanted to briefly speak to: the Department of Finance, due to the federal cancellation of the wage subsidy program, does not have that line item in their budget; neither does ECE have a similar budget. I am going to try to sneak two questions in here. Do we have any data of how many people who received that money were on Income Assistance? I just want to get a sense of whether there is a correlation of people making under \$18 an hour and also receiving Income Assistance. I am not sure if we have that data, but if we have that? If the Minister can speak to if there are any plans to create a wage subsidy program to essentially top up or subsidize the working poor? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you. I don't have those numbers. I am not sure if we can pull those numbers out. As for a wage subsidy program, we have a number of wage subsidy programs. There is no more time on the clock. I am sorry. I have to cut myself off there. Thank you.

---Laughter

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Members, before we finish this page, I just want to see if there are other Members who want to speak to the labour development and advanced education. We have had six Members already speak to it, but we still have four more. I just wanted to see so the Minister and staff know that they have to return tomorrow. We have one, two. Okay. Thank you. Mr. Norn.

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

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

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress. Sergeant-at-Arms, you can escort the witnesses out of the Chamber.

**MR. SPEAKER:** May I have the report, please, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes?

### Report of Committee of the Whole

**MS. SEMMLER:** Thank you, 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, 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? Member for Sahtu. 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

**DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Rutland):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Thursday, February 11, 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 6 of 7)
7. Acknowledgements
8. Oral Questions
9. Written Questions
10. Returns to Written Questions
11. Replies to Commissioner's Address
12. Petitions
13. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
14. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
15. Tabling of Documents
16. Notices of Motion
17. Motions
  - Motion 27-19(2), Extended Adjournment of the House to February 23, 2021
18. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
19. First Reading of Bills
20. Second Reading of Bills
21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
  - 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
  - Minister's Statement 77-19(2), National Housing Co-Investment Fund
  - Tabled Document 165-19(2), Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 1-19(2): Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery - Recommendations to the GNWT
  - Tabled Document 166-19(2), Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 2-19(2): Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery - Recommendations to the GNWT
  - Tabled Document 167-19(2), Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 3-19(2): Report on Long-Term Post-Pandemic Recovery - Recommendations to the GNWT
  - Tabled Document 286-19(2), Main Estimates 2021-2022

22. Report of Committee of the Whole

23. Third Reading of Bills

24. Orders of the Day

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Thursday, February 11, 2021, at 1:30 p.m.

--ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 6:00 p.m.